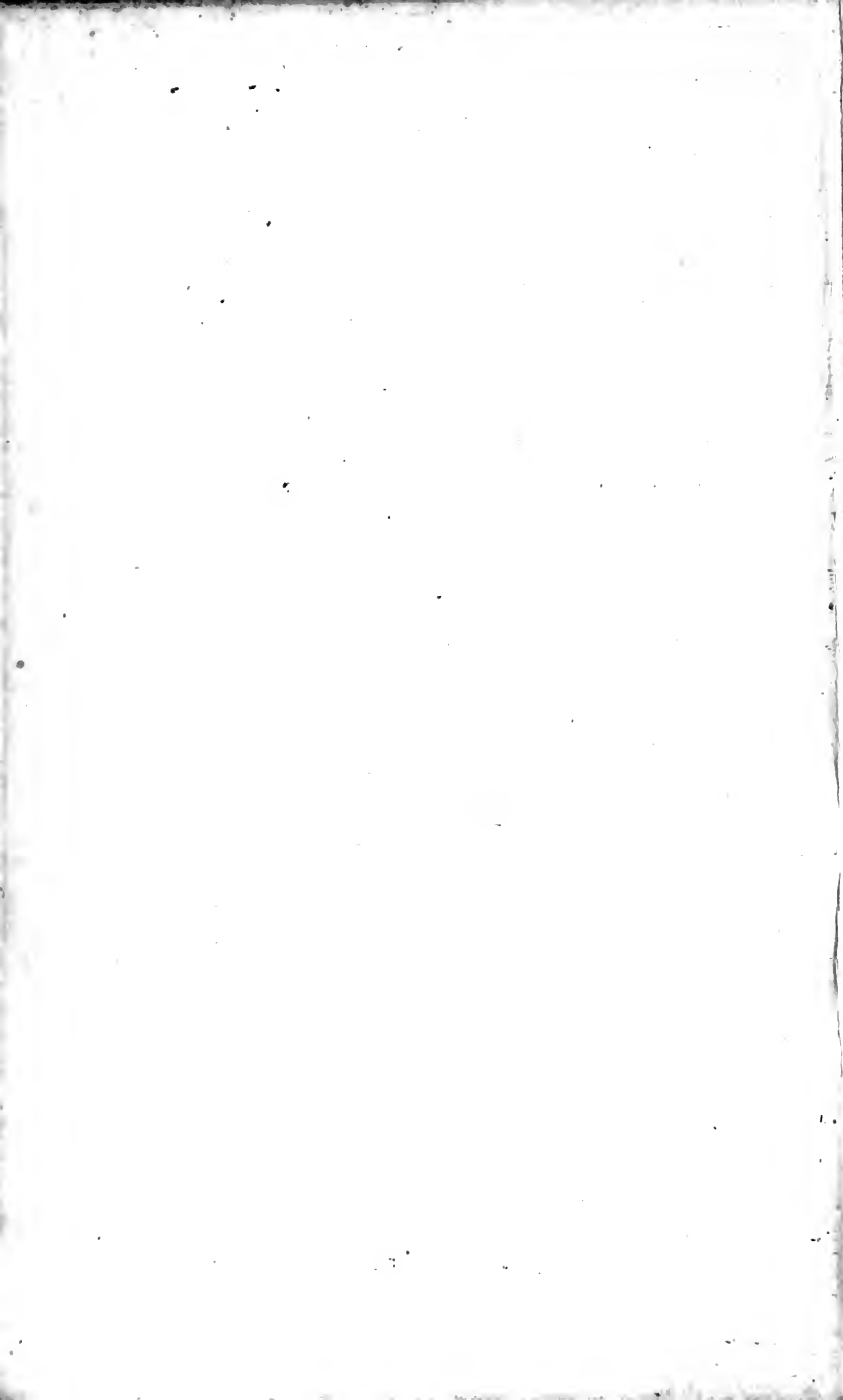
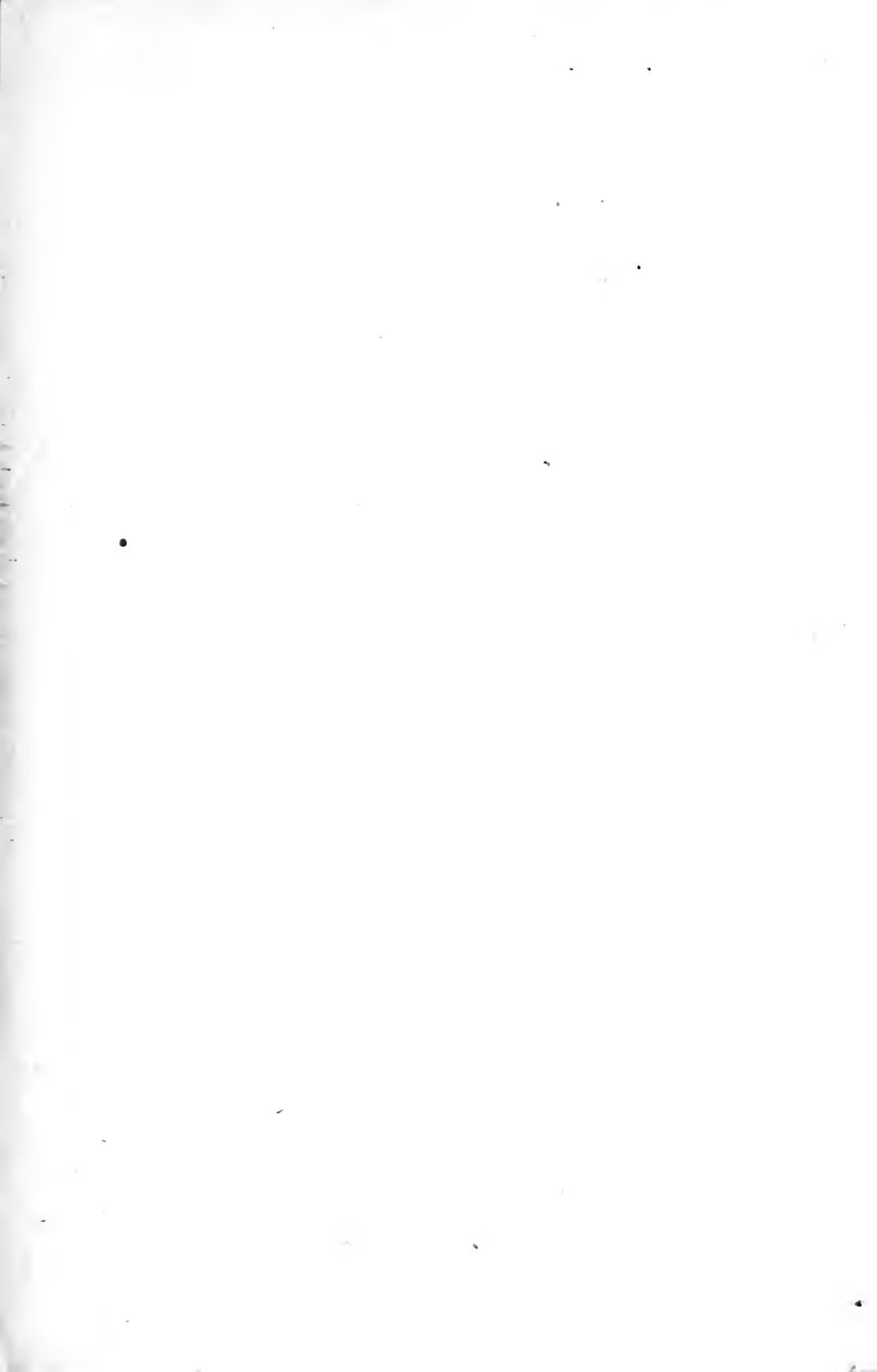
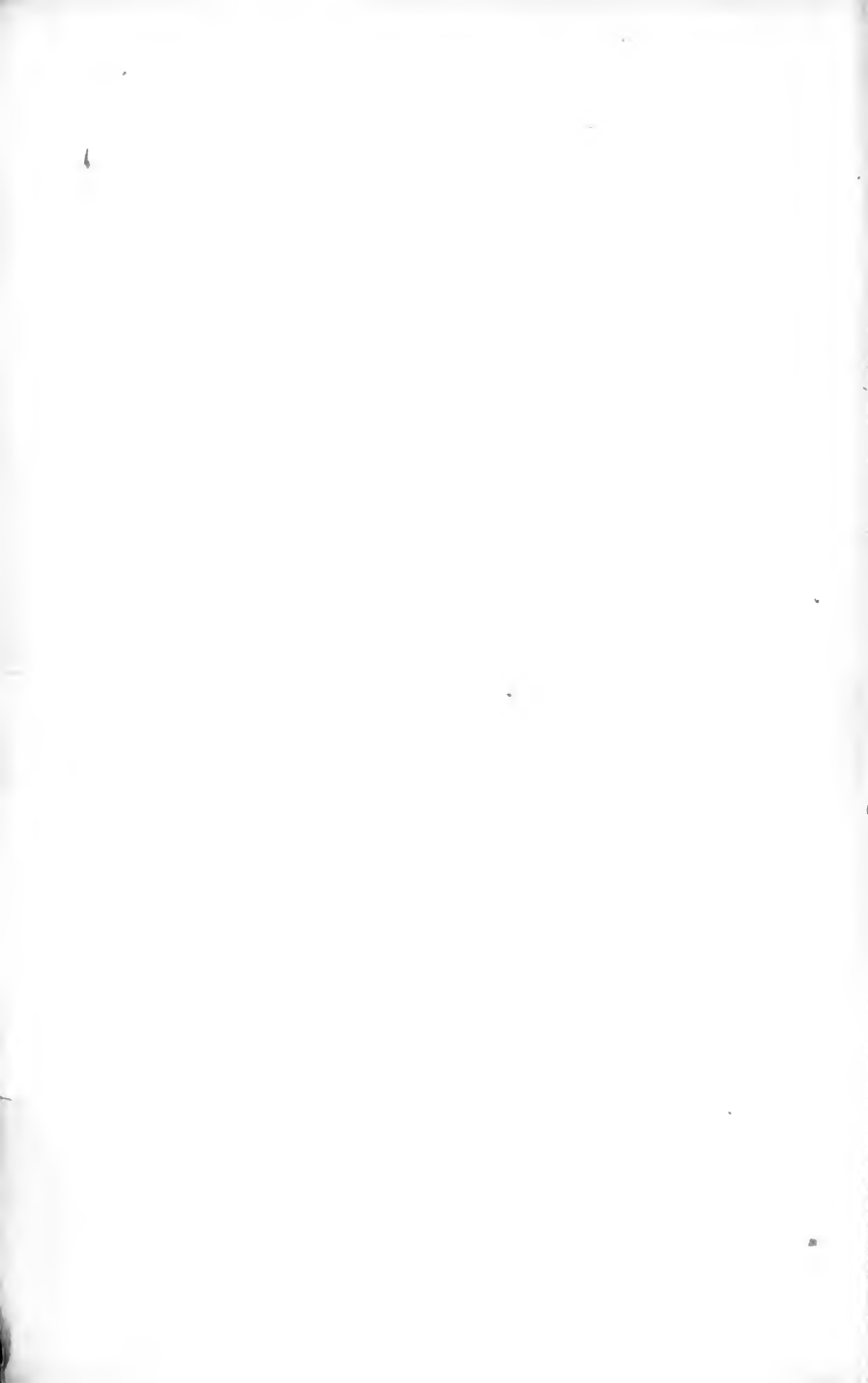


THE PLACE OF HONEYMOONS

HAROLD MACGRATH



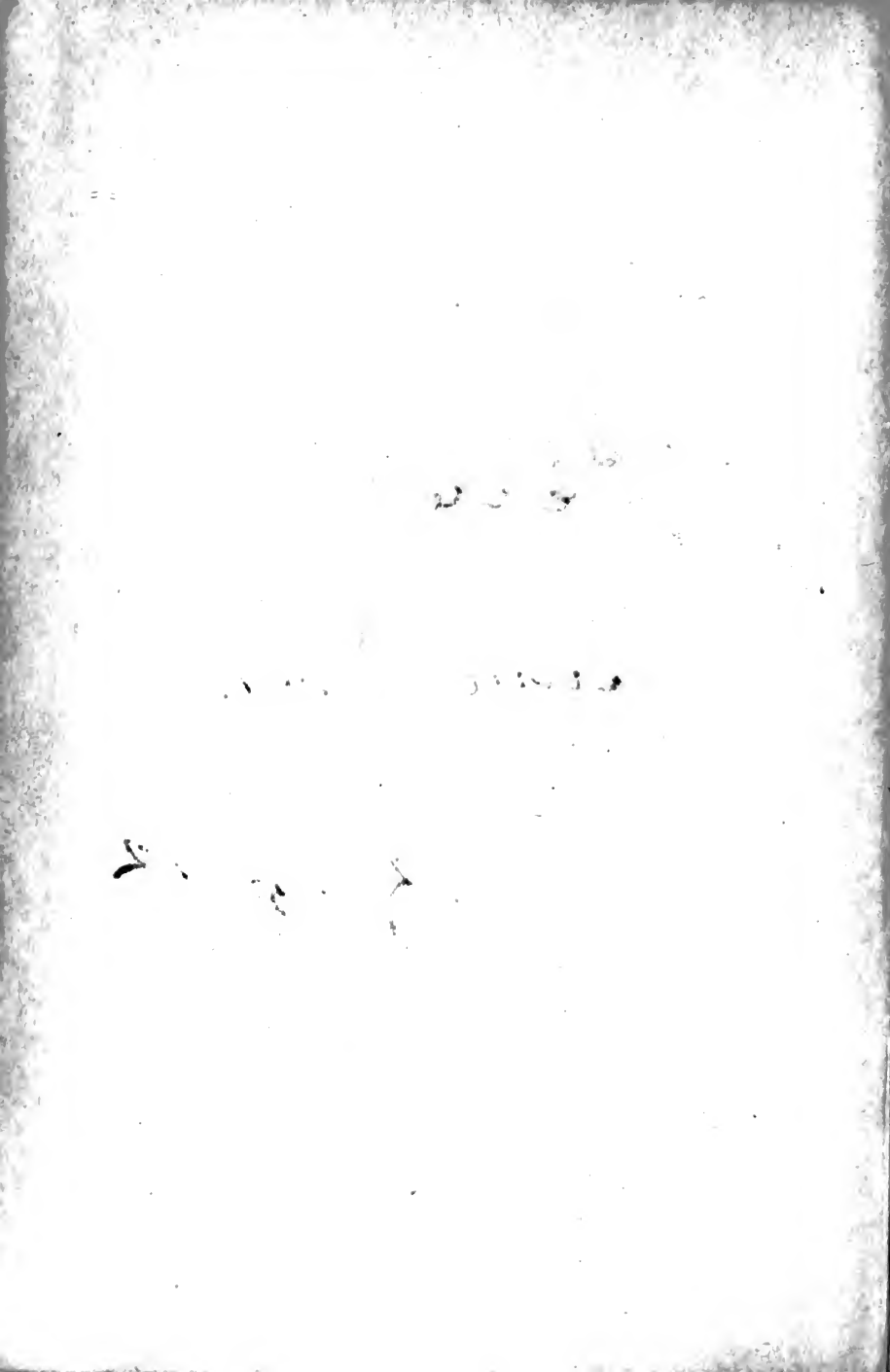




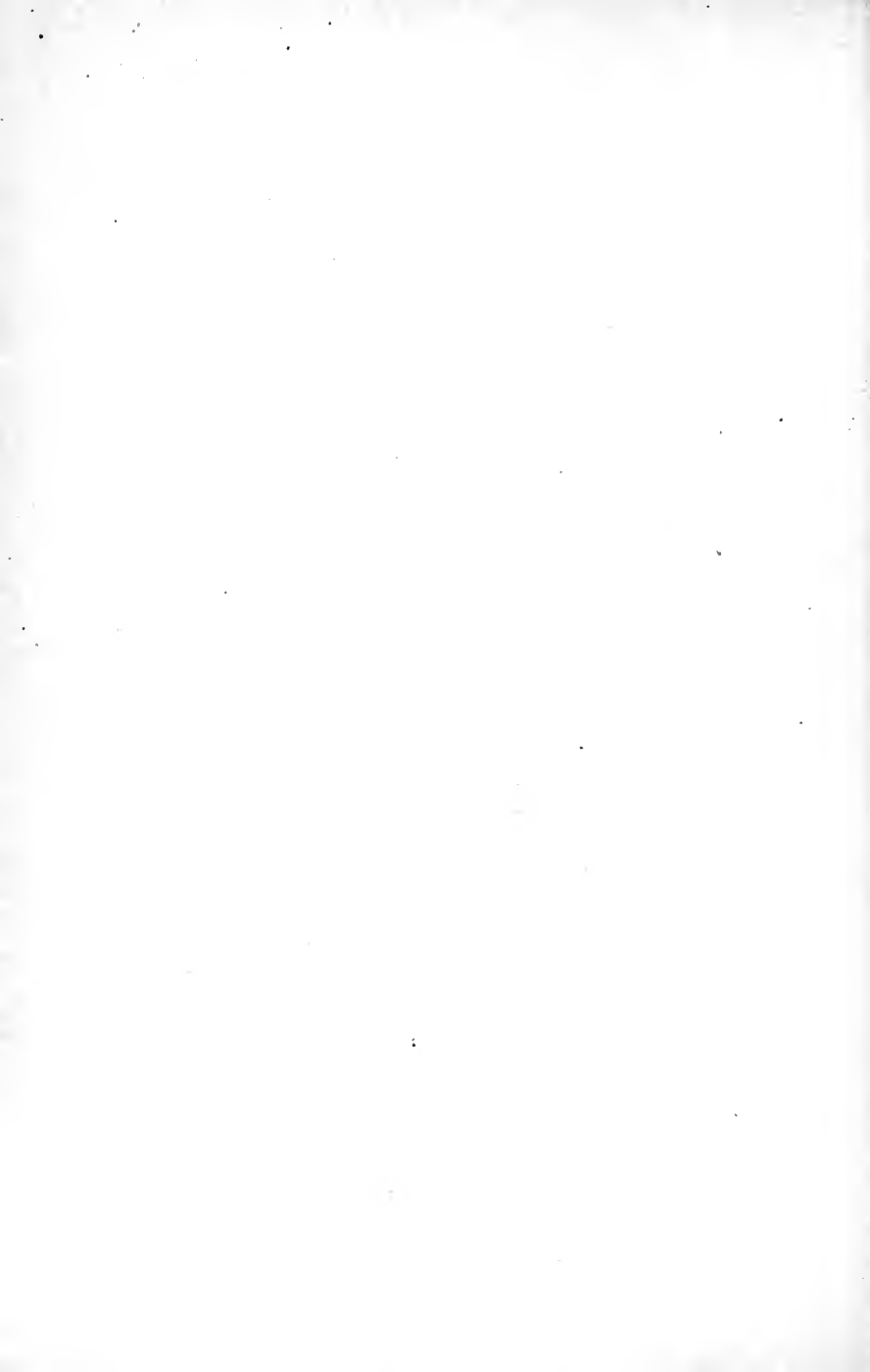
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THE PLACE OF HONEYMOONS



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"Your address!" bawled the Duke.

THE PLACE OF HONEYMOONS

By

HAROLD MACGRATH

Author of

THE MAN ON THE BOX, THE GOOSE GIRL,
THE CARPET FROM BAGDAD, ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

ARTHUR I. KELLER

INDIANAPOLIS
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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BOOKBINDERS AND PRINTERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

To B. O'G.

Horace calls no more to me,
Homer in the dust-heap lies:
I have found my Odyssey
In the lightness of her glee,
In the laughter of her eyes.

Ovid's page is thumbed no more,
E'en Catullus has no choice!
There is endless, precious lore,
Such as I ne'er knew before,
In the music of her voice.

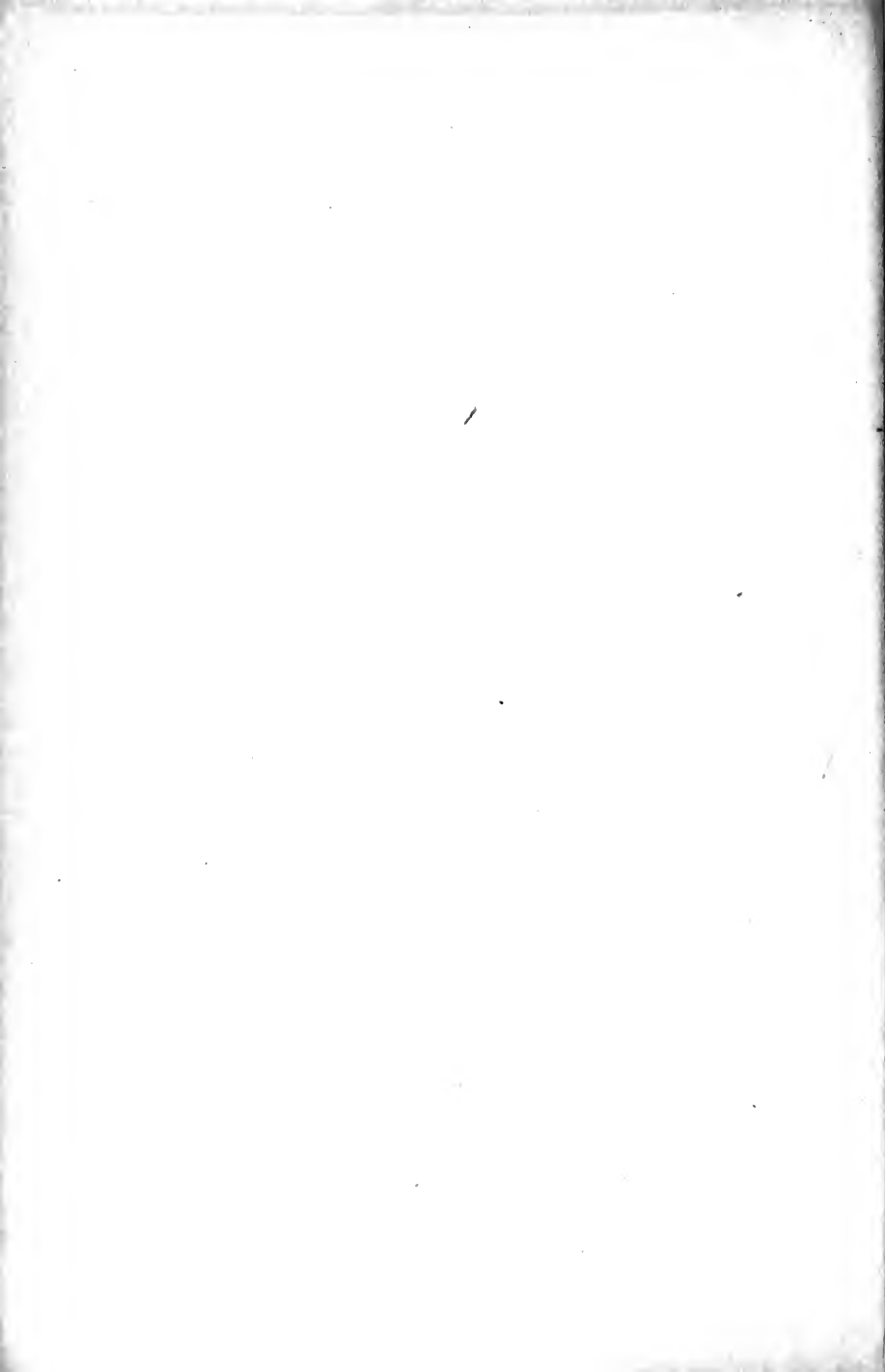
Breath of hyssop steeped in wine,
Breath of violets and furze,
Wild-wood roses, Grecian myrrhs,
All these perfumes do combine
In that maiden breath of hers.

Nay, I look not at the skies,
Nor the sun that hillward slips,
For the day lives or it dies
In the laughter of her eyes,
In the music of her lips!

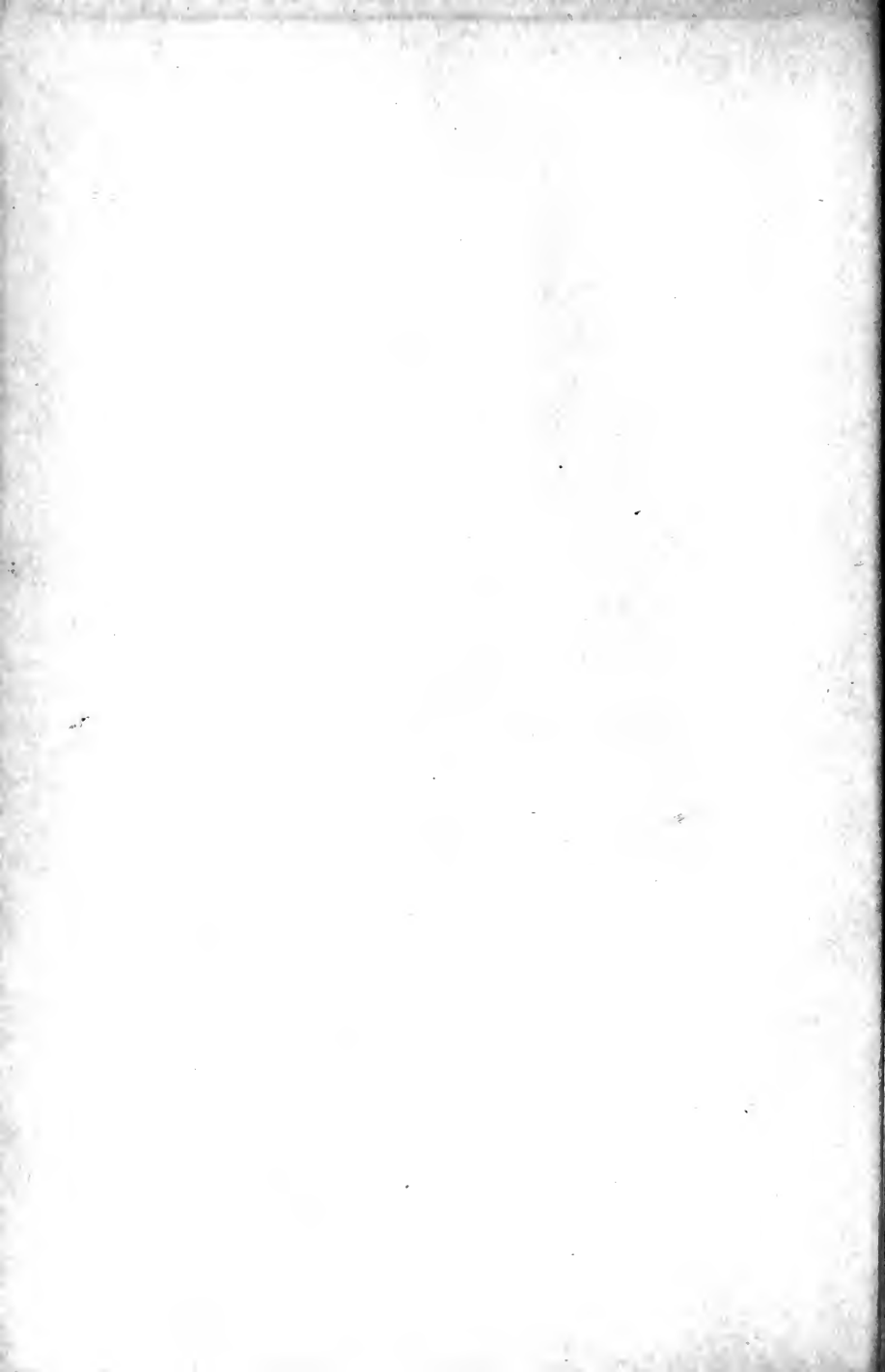


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THE PLACE OF HONEYMOONS



THE PLACE OF HONEYMOONS

CHAPTER I

AT THE STAGE DOOR

COURTLANDT sat perfectly straight; his ample shoulders did not touch the back of his chair; and his arms were folded tightly across his chest. The characteristic of his attitude was tenseness. The nostrils were well defined, as in one who sets the upper jaw hard upon the nether. His brown eyes — their gaze directed toward the stage whence came the voice of the prima donna — epitomized the tension, expressed the whole as in a word.

Just now the voice was pathetically subdued, yet reached every part of the auditorium, kindling the ear with its singularly mellowing sweetness. To Courtlandt it resembled, as no

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other sound, the note of a muffled Burmese gong, struck in the dim incensed cavern of a temple. A Burmese gong: briefly and magically the stage, the audience, the amazing gleam and scintillation of the Opera, faded. He heard only the voice and saw only the purple shadows in the temple at Rangoon, the oriental sunset splashing the golden dome, the wavering lights of the dripping candles, the dead flowers, the kneeling devoteés, the yellow-robed priests, the tatters of gold-leaf, fresh and old, upon the rows of placid grinning Buddhas. The vision was of short duration. The sigh, which had been so long repressed, escaped; his shoulders sank a little, and the angle of his chin became less resolute; but only for a moment. Tension gave place to an ironical grimness. The brows relaxed, but the lips became firmer. He listened, with this new expression unchanging, to the high note that soared above all others. The French horns blared and the timpani crashed. The

curtain sank slowly. The audience rustled, stood up, sought its wraps, and pressed toward the exits and the grand staircase. It was all over.

Courtlandt took his leave in leisure. Here and there he saw familiar faces, but these, after the finding glance, he studiously avoided. He wanted to be alone. For while the music was still echoing in his ears, in a subtone, his brain was afire with keen activity; but unfortunately for the going forward of things, this mental state was divided into so many battalions, led by so many generals, indirectly and indecisively, nowhere. This plan had no beginning, that one had no ending, and the other neither beginning nor ending. Outside he lighted a cigar, not because at that moment he possessed a craving for nicotine, but because like all inveterate smokers he believed that tobacco conduced to clarity of thought. And mayhap it did. At least, there presently followed a mental calm that expelled all this

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confusion. The goal waxed and waned as he gazed down the great avenue with its precise rows of lamps. Far away he could discern the outline of the brooding Louvre.

There was not the least hope in the world for him to proceed toward his goal this night. He realized this clearly, now that he was face to face with actualities. It required more than the chaotic impulses that had brought him back from the jungles of the Orient. He must reason out a plan that should be like a straight line, the shortest distance between two given points. How then should he pass the night, since none of his schemes could possibly be put into operation? Return to his hotel and smoke himself headachy? Try to become interested in a novel? Go to bed, to turn and roll till dawn? A wild desire seized him to make a night of it,—Maxim's, the cabarets; riot and wine. Who cared? But the desire burnt itself out between two puffs of his cigar. Ten years

ago, perhaps, this particular brand of amusement might have urged him successfully. But not now; he was done with tomfool nights. Indeed, his dissipations had been whimsical rather than banal; and retrospection never aroused a furtive sense of shame.

He was young, but not so young as an idle glance might conjecture in passing. To such casual reckoning he appeared to be in the early twenties; but scrutiny, more or less infallible, noting a line here or an angle there, was disposed to add ten years to the score. There was in the nose and chin a certain decisiveness which in true youth is rarely developed. This characteristic arrives only with manhood, manhood that has been tried and perhaps buffeted and perchance a little disillusioned. To state that one is young does not necessarily imply youth; for youth is something that is truly green and tender, not rounded out, aimless, light-hearted and desultory, charming and inconsequent. If man regrets his youth

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it is not for the passing of these pleasing though tangled attributes, but rather because there exists between the two periods of progression a series of irremediable mistakes. And the subject of this brief commentary could look back on many a grievous one, brought about by pride or carelessness rather than by intent.

But what was one to do who had both money and leisure linked to an irresistible desire to leave behind one place or thing in pursuit of another, indeterminately? At one time he wanted to be an artist, but his evenly balanced self-criticism had forced him to fling his daubs into the ash-heap. They were good daubs in a way, but were laid on without fire; such work as any respectable schoolmarm might have equaled if not surpassed. Then he had gone in for engineering; but precise and intricate mathematics required patience of a quality not at his command.

The inherent ambition was to make money;

but recognizing the absurdity of adding to his income, which even in his extravagance he could not spend, he gave himself over into the hands of grasping railroad and steamship companies, or their agencies, and became for a time the slave of guide and dragoman and carrier. And then the wanderlust, descended to him from the blood of his roving Dutch ancestors, which had lain dormant in the several generations following, sprang into active life again. He became known in every port of call. He became known also in the wildernesses. He had climbed almost inaccessible mountains, in Europe, in Asia; he had fished and hunted north, east, south and west; he had fitted out polar expeditions; he had raided the pearl markets; he had made astonishing gifts to women who had pleased his fancy, but whom he did not know or seek to know; he had kept some of his intimate friends out of bankruptcy; he had given the most extravagant dinners at one season and, unknown, had sup-

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ported a bread-line at another; he had even financed a musical comedy.

Whatever had for the moment appealed to his fancy, that he had done. That the world — his world — threw up its hands in wonder and despair neither disturbed him nor swerved him in the least. He was alone, absolute master of his millions. Mamas with marriageable daughters declared that he was impossible; the marriageable daughters never had a chance to decide one way or the other; and men called him a fool. He had promoted elephant fights which had stirred the Indian princes out of their melancholy indifference, and tiger hunts which had, by their duration and magnificence, threatened to disrupt the efficiency of the British military service,— whimsical excesses, not understandable by his intimate acquaintances who cynically arraigned him as the fool and his money.

But, like the villain in the play, his income still pursued him. Certain scandals inevitably

followed, scandals he was the last to hear about and the last to deny when he heard them. Many persons, not being able to take into the mind and analyze a character like Courtlandt's, sought the line of least resistance for their understanding, and built some precious exploits which included dusky island-princesses, diaphanous dancers, and comic-opera stars.

Simply, he was without direction; a thousand goals surrounded him and none burned with that brightness which draws a man toward his destiny: until one day. Personally, he possessed graces of form and feature, and was keener mentally than most young men who inherit great fortunes and distinguished names.

Automobiles of all kinds panted hither and thither. An occasional smart coupé went by as if to prove that prancing horses were still necessary to the dignity of the old aristocracy.

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Courtlandt made up his mind suddenly. He laughed with bitterness. He knew now that to loiter near the stage entrance had been his real purpose all along, and persistent lying to himself had not prevailed. In due time he took his stand among the gilded youth who were not privileged (like their more prosperous elders) to wait outside the dressing-rooms for their particular ballerina. By and by there was a little respectful commotion. Courtlandt's hand went instinctively to his collar, not to ascertain if it were properly adjusted, but rather to relieve the sudden pressure. He was enraged at his weakness. He wanted to turn away, but he could not.

A woman issued forth, muffled in silks and light furs. She was followed by another, quite possibly her maid. One may observe very well at times from the corner of the eye; that is, objects at which one is not looking come within the range of vision. The woman paused, her foot upon the step of the modest

limousine. She whispered something hurriedly into her companion's ear, something evidently to the puzzlement of the latter, who looked around irresolutely. She obeyed, however, and retreated to the stage entrance. A man, quite as tall as Courtlandt, his face shaded carefully, intentionally perhaps, by one of those soft Bavarian hats that are worn successfully only by Germans, stepped out of the gathering to proffer his assistance. Courtlandt pushed him aside calmly, lifted his hat, and smiling ironically, closed the door behind the singer. The step which the other man made toward Courtlandt was unequivocal in its meaning. But even as Courtlandt squared himself to meet the coming outburst, the stranger paused, shrugged his shoulders, turned and made off.

The lady in the limousine — very pale could any have looked closely into her face — was whirled away into the night. Courtlandt did not stir from the curb. The limousine dwin-

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dled, once it flashed under a light, and then vanished.

"It is the American," said one of the waiting dandies.

"The icicle!"

"The volcano, rather, which fools believe extinct."

"Probably sent back her maid for her Bible. Ah, these Americans; they are very amusing."

"She was in magnificent voice to-night. I wonder why she never sings *Carmen*?"

"Have I not said that she is too cold? What! would you see frost grow upon the toreador's mustache? And what a name, what a name! Eleonora da Toscana!"

Courtlandt was not in the most amiable condition of mind, and a hint of the ribald would have instantly transformed a passive anger into a blind fury. Thus, a scene hung precariously; but its potentialities became as nothing on the appearance of another woman.

This woman was richly dressed, too richly.

Apparently she had trusted her modiste not wisely but too well: there was the strange and unaccountable inherent love of fine feathers and warm colors which is invariably the mute utterance of peasant blood. She was followed by a Russian, huge of body, Jovian of countenance. An expensive car rolled up to the curb. A liveried footman jumped down from beside the chauffeur and opened the door. The diva turned her head this way and that, a thin smile of satisfaction stirring her lips. For Flora Desimone loved the human eye whenever it stared admiration into her own; and she spent half her days setting traps and lures, rather successfully. She and her formidable escort got into the car which immediately went away with a soft purring sound. There was breeding in the engine, anyhow, thought Courtlandt, who longed to put his strong fingers around that luxurious throat which had, but a second gone, passed him so closely.

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"We shall never have war with Russia," said some one; "her dukes love Paris too well."

Light careless laughter followed this cynical observation. Another time Courtlandt might have smiled. He pushed his way into the passage leading to the dressing-rooms, and followed its windings until he met a human barrier. To his inquiry the answer was abrupt and perfectly clear in its meaning: La Signorina da Toscana had given most emphatic orders not to disclose her address to any one. Monsieur might, if he pleased, make further inquiries of the directors; the answer there would be the same. Presently he found himself gazing down the avenue once more. There were a thousand places to go to, a thousand pleasant things to do; yet he doddered, full of ill-temper, dissatisfaction, and self-contempt. He was weak, damnably weak; and for years he had admired himself, detachedly, as a man of pride. He started for-

ward, neither sensing his direction nor the perfected flavor of his Habana.

Opera singers were truly a race apart. They lived in the world but were not a part of it, and when they died, left only a memory which faded in one generation and became totally forgotten in another. What jealousies, what petty bickerings, what extravagances! With fancy and desire unchecked, what ingenious tricks they used to keep themselves in the public mind,—tricks begot of fickleness and fickleness begetting. And yet, it was a curious phase: their influence was generally found when history untangled for posterity some Gordian knot. In old times they had sung the *Marseillaise* and danced the *carmagnole* and indirectly plied the guillotine. And to-day they smashed prime ministers, petty kings, and bankers, and created fashions for the ruin of husbands and fathers of modest means. Devil take them! And Courtlandt flung his cigar into the street.

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He halted. The Madeleine was not exactly the goal for a man who had, half an hour before, contemplated a rout at Maxim's. His glance described a half-circle. There was Durand's; but Durand's on opera nights entertained many Americans, and he did not care to meet any of his compatriots to-night. So he turned down the Rue Royale, on the opposite side, and went into the Taverne Royale, where the patrons were not over particular in regard to the laws of fashion, and where certain ladies with light histories sought further adventures to add to their heptamérons. Now, Courtlandt thought neither of the one nor of the other. He desired isolation, safety from intrusion; and here, did he so signify, he could find it. Women gazed up at him and smiled, with interest as much as with invitation. He was brown from long exposure to the wind and the sun, that golden brown which is the gift of the sun-glitter on rocking seas. A traveler is generally indicated by this

artistry of the sun, and once noted instantly creates a speculative interest. Even his light brown hair had faded at the temples, and straw-colored was the slender mustache, the ends of which had a cavalier twist. He ignored the lips which smiled and the eyes which invited, and nothing more was necessary. One is not importuned at the *Taverne Royale*. He sat down at a vacant table and ordered a pint of champagne, drinking hastily rather than thirstily.

Would Monsieur like anything to eat?

No, the wine was sufficient.

Courtlandt poured out a second glass slowly. The wine bubbled up to the brim and overflowed. He had been looking at the glass with unseeing eyes. He set the bottle down impatiently. Fool! To have gone to Burma, simply to stand in the golden temple once more, in vain, to recall that other time: the starving kitten held tenderly in a woman's arms, his own scurry among the booths to find the milk

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so peremptorily ordered, and the smile of thanks that had been his reward! He had run away when he should have hung on. He should have fought every inch of the way. . . .

“Monsieur is lonely?”

A pretty young woman sat down before him in the vacant chair.

CHAPTER II

THERE IS A WOMAN?

ANGER, curiosity, interest; these sensations blanketed one another quickly, leaving only interest, which was Courtlandt's normal state of mind when he saw a pretty woman. It did not require very keen scrutiny on his part to arrive swiftly at the conclusion that this one was not quite in the picture. Her cheeks were not red with that redness which has a permanency of tone, neither waxing nor waning, abashed in daylight. Nor had her lips found their scarlet moisture from out the depths of certain little porcelain boxes. Decidedly she was out of place here, yet she evinced no embarrassment; she was cool, at ease. Courtlandt's interest strengthened.

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"Why do you think I am lonely, Made-moiselle?" he asked, without smiling.

"Oh, when one talks to one's self, strikes the table, wastes good wine, the inference is but natural. So, Monsieur is lonely."

Her lips and eyes, as grave and smileless as his own, puzzled him. An adventure? He looked at some of the other women. Those he could understand, but this one, no. At all times he was willing to smile, yet to draw her out he realized that he must preserve his gravity unbroken. The situation was not usual. His gaze came back to her.

"Is the comparison favorable to me?" she asked.

"It is. What is loneliness?" he demanded cynically.

"Ah, I could tell you," she answered. "It is the longing to be with the one we love; it is the hate of the wicked things we have done; it is remorse."

"That echoes of the Ambigu-Comique."

He leaned upon his arms. "What are you doing here?"

"I?"

"Yes. You do not talk like the other girls who come here."

"Monsieur comes here frequently, then?"

"This is the first time in five years. I came here to-night because I wanted to be alone, because I did not wish to meet any one I knew. I have scowled at every girl in the room, and they have wisely left me alone. I haven't scowled at you because I do not know what to make of you. That's frankness. Now, you answer my question."

"Would you spare me a glass of wine? I am thirsty."

He struck his hands together, a bit of orientalism he had brought back with him. The observant waiter instantly came forward with a glass.

The young woman sipped the wine, gazing into the glass as she did so. "Perhaps a

whim brought me here. But I repeat, Monsieur is lonely."

"So lonely that I am almost tempted to put you into a taxicab and run away with you."

She set down the glass.

"But I sha'n't," he added.

The spark of eagerness in her eyes was instantly curtailed. "There is a woman?" tentatively.

"Is there not always a woman?"

"And she has disappointed Monsieur?"
There was no marked sympathy in the tone.

"Since Eve, has that not been woman's part in the human comedy?" He was almost certain that her lips became firmer. "Smile, if you wish. It is not prohibitory here."

It was evident that the smile had been struggling for existence, for it endured to the fullness of half a minute. She had fine teeth. He scrutinized her more closely, and she bore it well. The forehead did not make for beauty; it was too broad and high, intellectual.

Her eyes were splendid. There was nothing at all ordinary about her. His sense of puzzlement renewed itself and deepened. What did she want of him? There were other men, other vacant chairs.

"Monsieur is certain about the taxicab?"

"Absolutely."

"Ah, it is to emulate Saint Anthony!"

"There are several saints of that name. To which do you refer?"

"Positively not to him of Padua."

Courtlandt laughed. "No, I can not fancy myself being particularly concerned about bambini. No, my model is Noah."

"Noah?" dubiously.

"Yes. At the time of the flood there was only one woman in the world."

"I am afraid that your knowledge of that event is somewhat obscured. Still, I understand."

She lifted the wine-glass again, and then he noticed her hand. It was large, white and

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strong; it was not the hand of a woman who dallied, who idled in primrose paths.

"Tell me, what is it you wish? You interest me, at a moment, too, when I do not want to be interested. Are you really in trouble? Is there anything I can do . . . barring the taxicab?"

She twirled the glass, uneasily. "I am not in actual need of assistance."

"But you spoke peculiarly regarding loneliness."

"Perhaps I like the melodrama. You spoke of the Ambigu-Comique."

"You are on the stage?"

"Perhaps."

"The Opera?"

"Again perhaps."

He laughed once more, and drew his chair closer to the table.

"Monsieur in other moods must have a pleasant laughter."

"I haven't laughed from the heart in a very

long time," he said, returning to his former gravity, this time unassumed.

"And I have accomplished this amazing thing?"

"No. You followed me here. But from where?"

"Followed you?" The effort to give a mocking accent to her voice was a failure.

"Yes. The idea just occurred to me. There were other vacant chairs, and there was nothing inviting in my facial expression. Come, let me have the truth."

"I have a friend who knows Flora Desimone."

"Ah!" As if this information was a direct visitation of kindness from the gods. "Then you know where the Calabrian lives? Give me her address."

There was a minute wrinkle above the unknown's nose; the shadow of a frown. "She is very beautiful."

"Bah! Did she send you after me? Give

me her address. I have come all the way from Burma to see Flora Desimone."

"To see her?" She unguardedly clothed the question with contempt, but she instantly forced a smile to neutralize the effect. Concerned with her own defined conclusions, she lost the fine ironic bitterness that was in the man's voice.

"Aye, indeed, to see her! Beautiful as Venus, as alluring as Phryne, I want nothing so much as to see her, to look into her eyes, to hear her voice!"

"Is it jealousy? I hear the tragic note." The certainty of her ground became as morass again. In his turn he was puzzling her.

"Tragedy? I am an American. We do not kill opera singers. We turn them over to the critics. I wish to see the beautiful Flora, to ask her a few questions. If she has sent you after me, her address, my dear young lady, her address." His eyes burned.

"I am afraid." And she was so. This

wasn't the tone of a man madly in love. It was wild anger.

"Afraid of what?"

"You."

"I will give you a hundred francs." He watched her closely and shrewdly.

Came the little wrinkle again, but this time urged in perplexity. "A hundred francs, for something I was sent to tell you?"

"And now refuse."

"It is very generous. She has a heart of flint, Monsieur."

"Well I know it. Perhaps now I have one of steel."

"Many sparks do not make a fire. Do you know that your French is very good?"

"I spent my boyhood in Paris; some of it. Her address, if you please." He produced a crisp note for a hundred francs. "Do you want it?"

She did not answer at once. Presently she opened her purse, found a stubby pencil and a

slip of paper, and wrote. "There it is, Monsieur." She held out her hand for the bank-note which, with a sense of bafflement, he gave her. She folded the note and stowed it away with the pencil.

"Thank you," said Courtlandt. "Odd paper, though." He turned it over. "Ah, I understand. You copy music."

"Yes, Monsieur."

This time the nervous flicker of her eyes did not escape him. "You are studying for the opera, perhaps?"

"Yes, that is it."

The eagerness of the admission convinced him that she was not. Who she was or whence she had come no longer excited his interest. He had the Calabrian's address and he was impatient to be off.

"Good night." He rose.

"Monsieur is not gallant."

"I was in my youth," he replied, putting on his hat.

The bald rudeness of his departure did not disturb her. She laughed softly and relievedly. Indeed, there was in the laughter an essence of mischief. However, if he carried away a mystery, he left one behind.

As he was hunting for a taxicab, the waiter ran out and told him that he had forgotten to settle for the wine. The lady had refused to do so. Courtlandt chuckled and gave him a ten-franc piece. In other days, in other circumstances, he would have liked to know more about the unknown who scribbled notes on composition paper. She was not an idler in the Rue Royale, and it did not require that indefinable intuition which comes of worldly-wiseness to discover this fact. She might be a friend of the Desimone woman, but she had stepped out of another sphere to become so. He recognized the quality that could adjust itself to any environment and come out scatheless. This was undeniably an American accomplishment; and yet she was distinctly a

Frenchwoman. He dismissed the problem from his mind and bade the driver go as fast as the police would permit.

Meanwhile the young woman waited five or ten minutes, and, making sure that Courtlandt had been driven off, left the restaurant. Round the corner she engaged a carriage. So that was Edward Courtlandt? She liked his face; there was not a weak line in it, unless stubbornness could be called such. But to stay away for two years! To hide himself in jungles, to be heard of only by his harebrained exploits! "Follow him; see where he goes," had been the command. For a moment she had rebelled, but her curiosity was not to be denied. Besides, of what use was friendship if not to be tried? She knew nothing of the riddle, she had never asked a question openly. She had accidentally seen a photograph one day, in a trunk tray, with this man's name scrawled across it, and upon this flimsy base she had builded a dozen romances, each of

which she had ruthlessly torn down to make room for another; but still the riddle lay unsolved. She had thrown the name into the conversation many a time, as one might throw a bomb into a crowd which had no chance to escape. Fizzles! The man had been calmly discussed and calmly dismissed. At odd times an article in the newspapers gave her an opportunity; still the frank discussion, still the calm dismissal. She had learned that the man was rich, irresponsible, vacillating, a picturesque sort of fool. But two years? What had kept him away that long? A weak man, in love, would not have made so tame a surrender. Perhaps he had not surrendered; perhaps neither of them had.

And yet, he sought the Calabrian. Here was another blind alley out of which she had to retrace her steps. Bother! That Puck of Shakespeare was right: What fools these mortals be! She was very glad that she possessed a true sense of humor, spiced with

harmless audacity. What a dreary world it must be to those who did not know how and when to laugh! They talked of the daring of the American woman: who but a French-woman would have dared what she had this night? The taxicab! She laughed. And this man was wax in the hands of any pretty woman who came along! So rumor had it. But she knew that rumor was only the attenuated ghost of Ananias, doomed forever to remain on earth for the propagation of inaccurate whispers. Wax! Why, she would have trusted herself in any situation with a man with those eyes and that angle of jaw. It was all very mystifying. "Follow him; see where he goes." The frank discussion, then, and the calm dismissal were but a woman's dissimulation. And he had gone to Flora Desimone's.

The carriage stopped before a handsome apartment-house in the Avenue de Wagram. The unknown got out, gave the driver his

fare, and rang the concierge's bell. The sleepy guardian opened the door, touched his gold-braided cap in recognition, and led the way to the small electric lift. The young woman entered and familiarly pushed the button. The apartment in which she lived was on the second floor; and there was luxury everywhere, but luxury subdued and charmed by taste. There were fine old Persian rugs on the floors, exquisite oils and water-colors on the walls; and rare Japanese silk tapestries hung between the doors. In one corner of the living-room was a bronze jar filled with artificial cherry blossoms; in another corner near the door, hung a flat bell-shaped piece of brass — a Burmese gong. There were many photographs ranged along the mantel-top; celebrities, musical, artistic and literary, each accompanied by a liberal expanse of autographic ink.

She threw aside her hat and wraps with that manner of inconsequence which dis-

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tinguishes the artistic temperament from the thrifty one, and passed on into the cozy dining-room. The maid had arranged some sandwiches and a bottle of light wine. She ate and drank, while intermittent smiles played across her merry face. Having satisfied her hunger, she opened her purse and extracted the bank-note. She smoothed it out and laughed aloud.

"Oh, if only he had taken me for a ride in the taxicab!" She bubbled again with merriment.

Suddenly she sprang up, as if inspired, and dashed into another room, a study. She came back with pen and ink, and with a celerity that came of long practise, drew five straight lines across the faint violet face of the bank-note. Within these lines she made little dots at the top and bottom of stubby perpendicular strokes, and strange interlineal hieroglyphics, and sweeping curves, all of which would have puzzled an Egyptolo-

gist if he were unused to the ways of musicians. Carefully she dried the composition, and then put the note away. Some day she would confound him by returning it.

A little later her fingers were moving softly over the piano keys; melodies in minor, sad and haunting and elusive, melodies that had never been put on paper and would always be her own: in them she might leap from comedy to tragedy, from laughter to tears, and only she would know. The midnight adventure was forgotten, and the hero of it, too. With her eyes closed and her lithe body swaying gently, she let the old weary pain in her heart take hold again.

CHAPTER III

THE BEAUTIFUL TIGRESS

FLORA DESIMONE had been born in a Calabrian peasant's hut, and she had rolled in the dust outside, yelling vigorously at all times. Specialists declare that the reason for all great singers coming from lowly origin is found in this early development of the muscles of the throat. Parents of means employ nurses or sedatives to suppress or at least to smother these infantile protests against being thrust inconsiderately into the turmoil of human beings. Flora yelled or slept, as the case might be; her parents were equally indifferent. They were too busily concerned with the getting of bread and wine. Moreover, Flora was one among many. The gods are always playing with the Calabrian peninsula,

heaving it up here or throwing it down there: *il terremoto*, the earthquake, the terror. Here nature tinkers vicariously with souls; and she seldom has time to complete her work. Constant communion with death makes for callousness of feeling; and the Calabrians and the Sicilians are the cruellest among the civilized peoples. Flora was ruthless.

She lived amazingly well in the premier of an apartment-hotel in the Champs-Élysées. In England and America she had amassed a fortune. Given the warm beauty of the Southern Italian, the passion, the temperament, the love of mischief, the natural cruelty, the inordinate craving for attention and flattery, she enlivened the nations with her affairs. And she never put a single beat of her heart into any of them. That is why her voice is still splendid and her beauty unchanging. She did not dissipate; calculation always barred her inclination; rather, she loitered about the Forbidden Tree and played that she

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had plucked the Apple. She had an example to follow; Eve had none.

Men scattered fortunes at her feet as foolish Greeks scattered floral offerings at the feet of their marble gods — without provoking the sense of reciprocity or generosity or mercy. She had worked; ah, no one would ever know how hard. She had been crushed, beaten, cursed, starved. That she had risen to the heights in spite of these bruising verbs in no manner enlarged her pity, but dulled and vitiated the little there was of it. Her mental attitude toward humanity was childish: as, when the parent strikes, the child blindly strikes back. She was determined to play, to enjoy life, to give back blow for blow, nor caring where she struck. She was going to press the juice from every grape. A thousand odd years gone, she would have led the cry in Rome — “Bread and the circus!” or “To the lions!” She would have disturbed Nero’s complacency, and he would have played

an obbligato instead of a solo at the burning. And she was malice incarnate. They came from all climes — her lovers — with roubles and lire and francs and shillings and dollars; and those who finally escaped her enchantment did so involuntarily, for lack of further funds. They called her villas Circe's isles. She hated but two things in the world; the man she could have loved and the woman she could not surpass.

Arrayed in a kimono which would have evoked the envy of the empress of Japan, supposing such a gorgeous raiment — peacocks and pine-trees, brilliant greens and olives and blues and purples — fell under the gaze of that lady's slanting eyes, she sat opposite the Slavonic Jove and smoked her cigarette between sips of coffee. Frequently she smiled. The short powerful hand of the man stroked his beard and he beamed out of his cunning eyes, eyes a trifle too porcine to suggest a keen intellect above them.

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"I am like a gorilla," he said; "but you are like a sleek tigress. I am stronger, more powerful than you; but I am always in fear of your claws. Especially when you smile like that. What mischief are you plotting now?"

She drew in a cloud of smoke, held it in her puffed cheeks as she glided round the table and leaned over his shoulders. She let the smoke drift over his head and down his beard. In that moment he was truly Jovian.

"Would you like me if I were a tame cat?" she purred.

"I have never seen you in that rôle. Perhaps I might. You told me that you would give up everything but the Paris season."

"I have changed my mind." She ran one hand through his hair and the other she entangled in his beard. "You'd change your mind, too, if you were a woman."

"I don't have to change my mind; you are always doing it for me. But I do not want

to go to America next winter." He drew her down so that he might look into her face. It was something to see.

"Bah!" She released herself and returned to her chair. "When the season is over I want to go to Capri."

"Capri! Too hot."

"I want to go."

"My dear, a dozen exiles are there, waiting to blow me up." He spoke Italian well. "You do not wish to see me spattered over the beautiful isle?"

"Tch! tch! That is merely your usual excuse. You never had anything to do with the police."

"No?" He eyed the end of his cigarette gravely. "One does not have to be affiliated with the police. There is class prejudice. We Russians are very fond of Egypt in the winter. Capri seems to be the half-way place. They wait for us, going and coming. Poor fools!"

"I shall go alone, then."

"All right." In his dull way he had learned that to pull the diva, one must agree with her. In agreeing with her one adroitly dissuaded her. "You go to Capri, and I'll go to the pavilion on the Neva."

She snuffed the cigarette in the coffee-cup and frowned. "Some day you will make me horribly angry."

"Beautiful tigress! If a man knew what you wanted, you would not want it. I can't hop about with the agility of those dancers at the Théâtre du Palais Royale. The best I can do is to imitate the bear. What is wrong?"

"They keep giving her the premier parts. She has no more fire in her than a dead grate. The English-speaking singers, they are having everything their own way. And none of them can act."

"My dear Flora, this Eleonora is an actress, first of all. That she can sing is a

matter of good fortune, no more. Be reasonable. The consensus of critical opinion is generally infallible; and all over the continent they agree that she can act. Come, come; what do you care? She will never approach your Carmen. . . ."

"You praise her to me?" tempest in her glowing eyes.

"I do not praise her. I am quoting facts. If you throw that cup, my tigress. . . ."

"Well?" dangerously.

"It will spoil the set. Listen. Some one is at the speaking-tube."

The singer crossed the room impatiently. Ordinarily she would have continued the dispute, whether the bell rang or not. But she was getting the worst of the argument and the bell was a timely diversion. The duke followed her leisurely to the wall.

"What is it?" asked Flora in French.

The voice below answered with a query in English. "Is this the Signorina Desimone?"

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"It is the duchess."

"The duchess?"

"Yes."

"The devil!"

She turned and stared at the duke, who shrugged. "No, no," she said; "the duchess, not the devil."

"Pardon me; I was astonished. But on the stage you are still Flora Desimone?"

"Yes. And now that my identity is established, who are you and what do you want at this time of night?"

The duke touched her arm to convey that this was not the moment in which to betray her temper.

"I am Edward Courtlandt."

"The devil!" mimicked the diva.

She and the duke heard a chuckle.

"I beg your pardon again, Madame."

"Well, what is it you wish?" amiably.

The duke looked at her perplexedly. It seemed to him that she was always leaving

him in the middle of things. Preparing himself for rough roads, he would suddenly find the going smooth. He was never swift enough mentally to follow these flying transitions from enmity to amity. In the present instance, how was he to know that his tigress had found in the man below something to play with?

"You once did me an ill turn," came up the tube. "I desire that you make some reparation."

"Sainted Mother! but it has taken you a long time to find out that I have injured you," she mocked.

There was no reply to this; so she was determined to stir the fire a little.

"And I advise you to be careful what you say; the duke is a very jealous man."

That gentleman fingered his beard thoughtfully.

"I do not care a hang if he is."

The duke coughed loudly close to the tube.

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Silence.

"The least you can do, Madame, is to give me her address."

"Her address!" repeated the duke relievedly. He had had certain grave doubts, but these now took wing. Old flames were not in the habit of asking, nay, demanding, other women's addresses.

"I am speaking to Madame, your Highness," came sharply.

"We do not speak off the stage," said the singer, pushing the duke aside.

"I should like to make that young man's acquaintance," whispered the duke.

She warned him to be silent.

Came the voice again: "Will you give me her address, please? Your messenger gave me your address, inferring that you wished to see me."

"I?" There was no impeaching her astonishment.

"Yes, Madame."

"My dear Mr. Courtlandt, you are the last man in all the wide world I wish to see. And I do not quite like the way you are making your request. His highness does not either."

"Send him down!"

"That is true."

"What is?"

"I remember. You are very strong and much given to fighting."

The duke opened and shut his hands, pleasantly. Here was something he could understand. He was a fighting man himself. Where was this going to end, and what was it all about?

"Do you not think, Madame, that you owe me something?"

"No. What I owe I pay. Think, Mr. Courtlandt; think well."

"I do not understand," impatiently.

"*Ebbene*, I owe you nothing. Once I heard you say — 'I do not like to see you with the Calabrian; she is — Well, you know.' I

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stood behind you at another time when you said that I was a fool."

"Madame, I do not forget that, that is pure invention. You are mistaken."

"No. You were. I am no fool." A light laugh drifted down the tube.

"Madame, I begin to see."

"Ah!"

"You believe what you wish to believe."

"I think not."

"I never even noticed you," carelessly.

"Take care!" whispered the duke, who noted the sudden dilation of her nostrils.

"It is easy to forget," cried the diva, furiously. "It is easy for you to forget, but not for me."

"Madame, I do not forget that you entered my room that night . . ."

"Your address!" bawled the duke. "That statement demands an explanation."

"I should explain at once, your Highness," said the man down below calmly, "only I

prefer to leave that part in Madame's hands. I should not care to rob her of anything so interesting and dramatic. Madame the duchess can explain, if she wishes. I am stopping at the Grand, if you find her explanations are not up to your requirements."

"I shall give you her address," interrupted the diva, hastily. The duke's bristling beard for one thing and the ice in the other man's tones for another, disquieted her. The play had gone far enough, much as she would have liked to continue it. This was going deeper than she cared to go. She gave the address and added: "To-night she sings at the Austrian ambassador's. I give you this information gladly because I know that it will be of no use to you."

"Then I shall dispense with the formality of thanking you. I add that I wish you two-fold the misery you have carelessly and gratuitously cost me. Good night!" Click! went the little covering of the tube.

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"Now," said the duke, whose knowledge of the English tongue was not so indifferent that he did not gather the substance, if not all the shadings, of this peculiar conversation; "now, what the devil is all this about?"

"I hate him!"

"Refused to singe his wings?"

"He has insulted me!"

"I am curious to learn about that night you went to his room."

Her bear had a ring in his nose, but she could not always lead him by it. So, without more ado, she spun the tale, laughing at intervals. The story evidently impressed the duke, for his face remained sober all through the recital.

"Did he say that you were a fool?"

"Of course not!"

"Shall I challenge him?"

"Oh, my Russian bear, he fences like a Chicot; he is a dead shot; and is afraid of nothing . . . but a woman. No, no; I

have something better. It will be like one of those old comedies. I hate her!" with a burst of fury. "She always does everything just so much better than I do. As for him, he was nothing. It was she; I hurt her, wrung her heart."

"Why?" mildly.

"Is not that enough?"

"I am slow; it takes a long time for anything to get into my head; but when it arrives, it takes a longer time to get it out."

"Well, go on." Her calm was ominous.

"Love or vanity. This American singer got what you could not get. You have had your way too long. Perhaps you did not love him. I do not believe you can really love any one but Flora. Doubtless he possessed millions; but on the other hand, I am a grand duke; I offered marriage, openly and legally, in spite of all the opposition brought to bear."

Flora was undeniably clever. She did the one thing that could successfully cope with

this perilous condition of the ducal mind. She laughed, and flung her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"I have named you well. You are a tigress. But this comedy of which you speak: it might pass in Russia, but not in Paris."

"I shall not be in the least concerned. My part was suggestion."

"You suggested it to some one else?"

"To be sure!"

"My objections . . ."

"I will have my way in this affair. Besides, it is too late."

Her gesture was explicit. He sighed. He knew quite well that she was capable of leaving the apartment that night, in her kimono.

"I'll go to Capri," resignedly. Dynamite bombs were not the worst things in the world.

"I don't want to go now."

The duke picked up a fresh cigarette. "How the devil must have laughed when the Lord made Eve!"

CHAPTER IV

THE JOKE OF MONSIEUR

WITH the same inward bitterness that attends the mental processes of a performing tiger on being sent back to its cage, Courtlandt returned to his taxicab. He wanted to roar and lash and devour something. Instead, he could only twist the ends of his mustache savagely. So she was a grand duchess, or at least the morganatic wife of a grand duke! It did not seem possible that any woman could be so full of malice. He simply could not understand. It was essentially the Italian spirit; doubtless, till she heard his voice, she had forgotten all about the episode that had foundered his ship of happiness.

Her statement as to the primal cause was

purely inventive. There was not a grain of truth in it. He could not possibly have been so rude. He had been too indifferent. Too indifferent! The repetition of the phrase made him sit straighter. Pshaw! It could not be that. He possessed a little vanity; if he had not, his history would not have been worth a scrawl. But he denied the possession vehemently, as men are wont to do. Strange, a man will admit smashing those ten articles of advisement known as the decalogue and yet deny the inherent quality which surrenders the admission — vanity. However you may look at it, man's vanity is a complex thing. The vanity of a woman has a definite and commendable purpose: the conquest of man, his purse, and half of his time.

Too indifferent! Was it possible that he had roused her enmity simply because he had made it evident that her charms did not interest him? Beyond lifting his hat to her, perhaps exchanging a comment on the weather,

his courtesies had not been extended. Courtlandt was peculiar in some respects. A woman attracted him, or she did not. In the one case he was affable, winning, pleasant, full of those agreeable little surprises that in turn attract a woman. In the other case, he passed on, for his impressions were instant and did not require the usual skirmishing.

A grand duchess! The straw-colored mustache now described two aggressive points. What an impossible old world it was! The ambition of the English nobility was on a far lower scale than that of their continental cousins. On the little isle they were satisfied to marry soubrettes and chorus girls. Here, the lady must be no less a *personage* than a grand-opera singer or a *primiere danseuse*. The continental noble at least showed some discernment; he did not choose haphazard; he desired the finished product and was not to be satisfied with the material in the raw.

Oh, stubborn Dutchman that he had been!

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Blind fool! To have run away instead of fighting to the last ditch for his happiness! The Desimone woman was right: it had taken him a long time to come to the conclusion that she had done him an ill turn. And during all these weary months he had drawn a melancholy picture of himself as a wounded lion, creeping into the jungle to hide its hurts, when, truth be known, he had taken the ways of the jackass for a model. He saw plainly enough now. More than this, where there had been mere obstacles to overcome there were now steep mountains, perhaps inaccessible for all he knew. His jaw set, and the pressure of his lips broke the sweep of his mustache, converting it into bristling tufts, warlike and resolute.

As he was leaving, a square of light attracted his attention. He looked up to see the outline of the bearded Russ in the window. Poor devil! He was going to have a merry time of it. Well, that was his affair. Be-

sides, Russians, half the year chilled by their bitter snows, were susceptible to volcanoes; they courted them as a counterbalance. Perhaps he had spoken roughly, but his temper had not been under control. One thing he recalled with grim satisfaction. He had sent a barbed arrow up the tube to disturb the felicity of the dove-cote. The duke would be rather curious to know what was meant in referring to the night she had come to his, Courtlandt's, room. He laughed. It would be a fitting climax indeed if the duke called him out.

But what of the pretty woman in the Taverne Royale? What about her? At whose bidding had she followed him? One or the other of them had not told the truth, and he was inclined to believe that the prevarication had its source in the pomegranate lips of the Calabrian. To give the old barb one more twist, to learn if its venomous point still held and hurt; nothing would have afforded the

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diva more delight. Courtlandt glared at the window as the shade rolled down.

When the taxicab joined the long line of carriages and automobiles opposite the Austrian ambassador's, Courtlandt awoke to the dismal and disquieting fact that he had formulated no plan of action. He had done no more than to give the driver his directions; and now that he had arrived, he had the choice of two alternatives. He could wait to see her come out or return at once to his hotel, which, as subsequent events affirmed, would have been the more sensible course. He would have been confronted with small difficulty in gaining admission to the house. He knew enough of these general receptions; the announcing of his name would have conveyed nothing to the host, who knew perhaps a third of his guests, and many of these but slightly. But such an adventure was distasteful to Courtlandt. He could not overstep certain recognized boundaries of convention, and to enter a man's

house unasked was colossal impudence. Beyond this, he realized that he could have accomplished nothing; the advantage would have been hers. Nor could he meet her as she came out, for again the odds would have been largely in her favor. No, the encounter must be when they two were alone. She must be surprised. She must have no time to use her ready wit. He had thought to wait until some reasonable plan offered itself for trial; yet, here he was, with nothing definite or recognizable but the fact that the craving to see her was not to be withstood. The blood began to thunder in his ears. An idea presented itself. It appealed to him at that moment as quite clever and feasible.

“Wait!” he called to the driver.

He dived among the carriages and cars, and presently he found what he sought,—her limousine. He had taken the number into his mind too keenly to be mistaken. He saw the end of his difficulties; and he went about the

affair with his usual directness. It was only at rare times that he ran his head into a cul-de-sac. If her chauffeur was regularly employed in her service, he would have to return to the hotel; but if he came from the garage, there was hope. Every man is said to have his price, and a French chauffeur might prove no notable exception to the rule.

"Are you driver for Madame da Toscana?" Courtlandt asked of the man lounging in the forward seat.

The chauffeur looked hard at his questioner, and on finding that he satisfied the requirements of a gentleman, grumbled an affirmative. The limousine was well known in Paris, and he was growing weary of these endless inquiries.

"Are you in her employ directly, or do you come from the garage?"

"I am from the garage, but I drive mademoiselle's car most of the time, especially

at night. It is not madame but mademoiselle, Monsieur."

"My mistake." A slight pause. It was rather a difficult moment for Courtlandt. The chauffeur waited wonderingly. "Would you like to make five hundred francs?"

"How, Monsieur?"

Courtlandt should have been warned by the tone, which contained no unusual interest or eagerness.

"Permit me to remain in mademoiselle's car till she comes. I wish to ride with her to her apartment."

The chauffeur laughed. He stretched his legs. "Thanks, Monsieur. It is very dull waiting. Monsieur knows a good joke."

And to Courtlandt's dismay he realized that his proposal had truly been accepted as a jest.

"I am not joking. I am in earnest. Five hundred francs. On the word of a gentleman I mean mademoiselle no harm. I am

known to her. All she has to do is to appeal to you, and you can stop the car and summon the police."

The chauffeur drew in his legs and leaned toward his tempter. "Monsieur, if you are not jesting, then you are a madman. Who are you? What do I know about you? I never saw you before, and for two seasons I have driven mademoiselle in Paris. She wears beautiful jewels to-night. How do I know that you are not a gentlemanly thief? Ride home with mademoiselle! You are crazy. Make yourself scarce, Monsieur; in one minute I shall call the police."

"Blockhead!"

English of this order the Frenchman perfectly understood. "*Là, là!*" he cried, rising to execute his threat.

Courtlandt was furious, but his fury was directed at himself as much as at the trustworthy young man getting down from the limousine. His eagerness had led him to mis-

take stupidity for cleverness. He had gone about the affair with all the clumsiness of a boy who was making his first appearance at the stage entrance. It was mightily disconcerting, too, to have found an honest man when he was in desperate need of a dishonest one. He had faced with fine courage all sorts of dangerous wild animals; but at this moment he hadn't the courage to face a policeman and endeavor to explain, in a foreign tongue, a situation at once so delicate and so singularly open to misconstruction. So, for the second time in his life he took to his heels. Of the first time, more anon. He scrambled back to his own car, slammed the door, and told the driver to drop him at the Grand. His undignified retreat caused his face to burn; but discretion would not be denied. However, he did not return to the hotel.

Mademoiselle da Toscana's chauffeur scratched his chin in perplexity. In frightening off his tempter he recognized that now he

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would never be able to find out who he was. He should have played with him until mademoiselle came out. She would have known instantly. That would have been the time for the police. To hide in the car! What the devil! Only a madman would have offered such a proposition. The man had been either an American or an Englishman, for all his accuracy in the tongue. Bah! Perhaps he had heard her sing that night, and had come away from the Opera, moonstruck. It was not an isolated case. The fools were always pestering him, but no one had ever offered so uncommon a bribe: five hundred francs. Mademoiselle might not believe that part of the tale. Mademoiselle was clever. There was a standing agreement between them that she would always give him half of whatever was offered him in the way of bribes. It paid. It was easier to sell his loyalty to her for two hundred and fifty francs than to betray her for five hundred. She had yet to find him

untruthful, and to-night he would be as frank as he had always been.

But who was this fellow in the Bavarian hat, who patrolled the sidewalk? He had been watching him when the madman approached. For an hour or more he had walked up and down, never going twenty feet beyond the limousine. He couldn't see the face. The long dark coat had a military cut about the hips and shoulders. From time to time he saw him glance up at the lighted windows. Eh, well; there were other women in the world besides mademoiselle, several others.

He had to wait only half an hour for her appearance. He opened the door and saw to it that she was comfortably seated; then he paused by the window, touching his cap.

"What is it, François?"

"A gentleman offered me five hundred francs, Mademoiselle, if I would permit him to hide in the car."

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"Five hundred francs? To hide in the car? Why didn't you call the police?"

"I started to, Mademoiselle, but he ran away."

"Oh! What was he like?" The prima donna dropped the bunch of roses on the seat beside her.

"Oh, he looked well enough. He had the air of a gentleman. He was tall, with light hair and mustache. But as I had never seen him before, and as Mademoiselle wore some fine jewels, I bade him be off."

"Would you know him again?"

"Surely, Mademoiselle."

"The next time any one bothers you, call the police. You have done well, and I shall remember it. Home."

The man in the Bavarian hat hurried back to the third car from the limousine, and followed at a reasonably safe distance.

The singer leaned back against the cushions.

She was very tired. The opera that night had taxed her strength, and but for her promise she would not have sung to the ambassador's guests for double the fee. There was an electric bulb in the car. She rarely turned it on, but she did to-night. She gazed into the little mirror; and utter weariness looked back from out the most beautiful, blue, Irish eyes in the world. She rubbed her fingers carefully up and down the faint perpendicular wrinkle above her nose. It was always there on nights like this. How she longed for the season to end! She would fly away to the lakes, the beautiful, heavenly tinted lakes, the bare restful mountains, and the clover lawns spreading under brave old trees; she would walk along the vineyard paths, and loiter under the fig-trees, far, far away from the world, its clamor, its fickleness, its rasping jealousies. Some day she would have enough; and then, good-by to all the clatter, the evil-smelling

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stages, the impossible people with whom she was associated. She would sing only to those she loved.

The glamour of the life had long ago passed; she sang on because she had acquired costly habits, because she was fond of beautiful things, and above all, because she loved to sing. She had as many moods as a bird, as many sides as nature. A flash of sunshine called to her voice; the beads of water, trembling upon the blades of grass after a summer shower, brought a song to her lips. Hers was a God-given voice, and training had added to it nothing but confidence. True, she could act; she had been told by many a great impressario that histrionically she had no peer in grand opera. But the knowledge gave her no thrill of delight. To her it was the sum of a tremendous physical struggle.

She shut off the light and closed her eyes. She reclined against the cushion once more, striving not to think. Once, her hands shut

tightly. Never, never, never! She pressed down the burning thoughts by recalling the bright scenes at the ambassador's, the real generous applause that had followed her two songs. Ah, how that man Paderewski played! They two had cost the ambassador eight thousand francs. Fame and fortune! Fortune she could understand; but fame! What was it? Upon a time she believed she had known what fame was; but that had been when she was striving for it. A glowing article in a newspaper, a portrait in a magazine, rows upon rows of curious eyes and a patter of hands upon hands; that was all; and for this she had given the best of her life, and she was only twenty-five.

The limousine stopped at last. The man in the Bavarian hat saw her alight. His car turned and disappeared. It had taken him a week to discover where she lived. His lodgings were on the other side of the Seine. After reaching them he gave crisp orders to the

driver, who set his machine off at top speed. The man in the Bavarian hat entered his room and lighted the gas. The room was bare and cheaply furnished. He took off his coat but retained his hat, pulling it down still farther over his eyes. His face was always in shadow. A round chin, two full red lips, scantily covered by a blond mustache were all that could be seen. He began to walk the floor impatiently, stopping and listening whenever he heard a sound. He waited less than an hour for the return of the car. It brought two men. They were well-dressed, smoothly-shaven, with keen eyes and intelligent faces. Their host, who had never seen either of his guests before, carelessly waved his hand toward the table where there were two chairs. He himself took his stand by the window and looked out as he talked. In another hour the room was dark and the street deserted.

In the meantime the prima donna gave a

sigh of relief. She was home. It was nearly two o'clock. She would sleep till noon, and Saturday and Sunday would be hers. She went up the stairs instead of taking the lift, and though the hall was dark, she knew her way. She unlocked the door of the apartment and entered, swinging the door behind her. As the act was mechanical, her thoughts being otherwise engaged, she did not notice that the lock failed to click. The ferrule of a cane had prevented that.

She flung her wraps on the divan and put the roses in an empty bowl. The door opened softly, without noise. Next, she stopped before the mirror over the mantel, touched her hair lightly, detached the tiara of emeralds . . . and became as inanimate as marble. She saw another face. She never knew how long the interval of silence was. She turned slowly.

"Yes, it is I!" said the man.

Instantly she turned again to the mantel and picked up a magazine-revolver. She leveled it at him.

"Leave this room, or I will shoot."

Courtlandt advanced toward her slowly. "Do so," he said. "I should much prefer a bullet to that look."

"I am in earnest." She was very white, but her hand was steady.

He continued to advance. There followed a crash. The smell of burning powder filled the room. The Burmese gong clanged shrilly and whirled wildly. Courtlandt felt his hair stir in terror.

"You must hate me indeed," he said quietly, as the sense of terror died away. He folded his arms. "Try again; there ought to be half a dozen bullets left. No? Then, good-by!" He left the apartment without another word or look, and as the door closed behind him there was a kind of finality in the clicking of the latch.

The revolver clattered to the floor, and the woman who had fired it leaned heavily against the mantel, covering her eyes.

"Nora, Nora!" cried a startled voice from a bedroom adjoining. "What has happened? *Mon Dieu*, what is it?" A pretty, sleepy-eyed young woman, in a night-dress, rushed into the room. She flung her arms about the singer. "Nora, my dear, my dear!"

"He forced his way in. I thought to frighten him. It went off accidentally. Oh, Celeste, Celeste, I might have killed him!"

The other drew her head down on her shoulder, and listened. She could hear voices in the lower hall, a shout of warning, a patter of steps; then the hall door slammed. After that, silence, save for the faint mellowing vibrations of the Burmese gong.

CHAPTER V

CAPTIVE OR RUNAWAY

AT the age of twenty-six Donald Abbott had become a prosperous and distinguished painter in water-colors. His work was individual, and at the same time it was delicate and charming. One saw his Italian landscapes as through a filmy gauze: the almond blossoms of Sicily, the rose-laden walls of Florence, the vineyards of Chianti, the poppy-glowing Campagna out of Rome. His Italian lakes had brought him fame. He knew very little of the grind and hunger that attended the careers of his whilom associates. His father had left him some valuable patents — wash-tubs, carpet-cleaners, and other labor-saving devices — and the royalties from these were quite sufficient to keep him pleasantly

housed. When he referred to his father (of whom he had been very fond) it was as an inventor. Of what, he rarely told. In America it was all right; but over here, where these inventions were unknown, a wash-tub had a peculiar significance: that a man should be found in his money through its services left persons in doubt as to his genealogical tree, which, as a matter of fact, was a very good one. As a boy his schoolmates had dubbed him "The Sweep" and "Suds", and it was only human that he should wish to forget.

His earnings (not inconsiderable, for tourists found much to admire in both the pictures and the artist) he spent in gratifying his mild extravagances. So there were no lines in his handsome, boyish, beardless face; and his eyes were unusually clear and happy. Perhaps once or twice, since his majority, he had returned to America to prove that he was not an expatriate, though certainly he was one, the only tie existing between him and his

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native land being the bankers who regularly honored his drafts. And who shall condemn him for perfering Italy to the desolate center of New York state, where good servants and good weather are as rare as are flawless emeralds?

Half after three, on Wednesday afternoon, Abbott stared moodily at the weather-tarnished group by Dalou in the Luxembourg gardens — the *Triumph of Silenus*. His gaze was deceptive, for the rollicking old bibulous scoundrel had not stirred his critical sense nor impressed the delicate films of thought. He was looking through the bronze, into the far-away things. He sat on his own folding stool, which he had brought along from his winter studio hard by in the old Boul' Miche'. He had arrived early that morning, all the way from Como, to find a thunderbolt driven in at his feet. Across his knees fluttered an open newspaper, the Paris edition of the New York *Herald*. All that kept it from blowing

away was the tense if sprawling fingers of his right hand; his left hung limply at his side.

It was not possible. Such things did not happen these unromantic days to musical celebrities. She had written that on Monday night she would sing in *La Bohème* and on Wednesday, *Faust*. She had since vanished, vanished as completely as though she had taken wings and flown away. It was unreal. She had left the apartment in the Avenue de Wagram on Saturday afternoon, and nothing had been seen or heard of her since. At the last moment they had had to find a substitute for her part in the Puccini opera. The maid testified that her mistress had gone on an errand of mercy. She had not mentioned where, but she had said that she would return in time to dress for dinner, which proved conclusively that something out of the ordinary had befallen her.

The automobile that had carried her away had not been her own, and the chauffeur was

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unknown. None of the directors at the Opera had been notified of any change in the singer's plans. She had disappeared, and they were deeply concerned. Singers were generally erratic, full of sudden indispositions, unaccountable whims; but the Signorina da Toscana was one in a thousand. She never broke an engagement. If she was ill she said so at once; she never left them in doubt until the last moment. Indecision was not one of her characteristics. She was as reliable as the sun. If the directors did not hear definitely from her by noon to-day, they would have to find another Marguerite.

The police began to move, and they stirred up some curious bits of information. A man had tried to bribe the singer's chauffeur, while she was singing at the Austrian ambassador's. The chauffeur was able to describe the stranger with some accuracy. Then came the bewildering episode in the apartment: the pistol-shot, the flight of the man, the astonished concierge

to whom the beautiful American would offer no explanations. The man (who tallied with the description given by the chauffeur) had obtained entrance under false representations. He claimed to be an emissary with important instructions from the Opera. There was nothing unusual in this; messengers came at all hours, and seldom the same one twice; so the concierge's suspicions had not been aroused. Another item. A tall handsome Italian had called at eleven o'clock Saturday morning, but the signorina had sent down word that she could not see him. The maid recalled that her mistress had intended to dine that night with the Italian gentleman. His name she did not know, having been with the signorina but two weeks.

Celeste Fournier, the celebrated young pianist and composer, who shared the apartment with the missing prima donna, stated that she hadn't the slightest idea where her friend was. She was certain that misfortune had over-

taken her in some inexplicable manner. To implicate the Italian was out of the question. He was well-known to them both. He had arrived again at seven, Saturday, and was very much surprised that the signorina had not yet returned. He had waited till nine, when he left, greatly disappointed. He was the Barone di Monte-Verdi in Calabria, formerly military attaché at the Italian embassy in Berlin. Sunday noon Mademoiselle Fournier had notified the authorities. She did not know, but she felt sure that the blond stranger knew more than any one else. And here was the end of things. The police found themselves at a standstill. They searched the hotels but without success; the blond stranger could not be found.

Abbott's eyes were not happy and pleasant just now. They were dull and blank with the reaction of the stunning blow. He, too, was certain of the Barone. Much as he secretly hated the Italian, he knew him to be a fearless

and an honorable man. But who could this blond stranger be who appeared so sinisterly in the two scenes? From where had he come? Why had Nora refused to explain about the pistol-shot? Any woman had a perfect right to shoot a man who forced his way into her apartment. Was he one of those mad fools who had fallen in love with her, and had become desperate? Or was it some one she knew and against whom she did not wish to bring any charges? Abducted! And she might be, at this very moment, suffering all sorts of indignities. It was horrible to be so helpless.

The sparkle of the sunlight upon the ferrule of a cane, extending over his shoulder, broke in on his agonizing thoughts. He turned, an angry word on the tip of his tongue. He expected to see some tourist who wanted to be informed.

“Ted Courtlandt!” He jumped up, overturning the stool. “And where the dickens

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did you come from? I thought you were in the Orient?"

"Just got back, Abby."

The two shook hands and eyed each other with the appraising scrutiny of friends of long standing.

"You don't change any," said Abbott.

"Nor do you. I've been standing behind you fully two minutes. What were you glooming about? Old Silenus offend you?"

"Have you read the *Herald* this morning?"

"I never read it nowadays. They are always giving me a roast of some kind. Whatever I do they are bound to misconstrue it." Courtlandt stooped and righted the stool, but sat down on the grass, his feet in the path. "What's the trouble? Have they been after you?"

Abbott rescued the offending paper and shaking it under his friend's nose, said: "Read that."

Courtlandt's eyes widened considerably as

they absorbed the significance of the heading —“ Eleonora da Toscana missing.”

“ Bah!” he exclaimed.

“ You say bah?”

“ It looks like one of their advertising dodges. I know something about singers,” Courtlandt added. “ I engineered a musical comedy once.”

“ You do not know anything about her,” cried Abbott hotly.

“ That’s true enough.” Courtlandt finished the article, folded the paper and returned it, and began digging in the path with his cane.

“ But what I want to know is, who the devil is this mysterious blond stranger?” Abbott flourished the paper again. “ I tell you, it’s no advertising dodge. She’s been abducted. The hound!”

Courtlandt ceased boring into the earth. “ The story says that she refused to explain this blond chap’s presence in her room. What do you make of that?”

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"Perhaps you think the fellow was her press-agent?" was the retort.

"Lord, no! But it proves that she knew him, that she did not want the police to find him. At least, not at that moment. Who's the Italian?" suddenly.

"I can vouch for him. He is a gentleman, honorable as the day is long, even if he is hot-headed at times. Count him out of it. It's this unknown, I tell you. Revenge for some imagined slight. It's as plain as the nose on your face."

"How long have you known her?" asked Courtlandt presently.

"About two years. She's the gem of the whole lot. Gentle, kindly, untouched by flattery. . . . Why, you must have seen and heard her!"

"I have." Courtlandt stared into the hole he had dug. "Voice like an angel's, with a face like Bellini's donna; and Irish all over.

But for all that, you will find that her disappearance will turn out to be a diva's whim. Hang it, Suds, I've had some experience with singers."

"You are a blockhead!" exploded the younger man.

"All right, I am." Courtlandt laughed.

"Man, she wrote me that she would sing Monday and to-night, and wanted me to hear her. I couldn't get here in time for *La Bohème*, but I was building on *Faust*. And when she says a thing, she means it. As you said, she's Irish."

"And I'm Dutch."

"And the stubbornest Dutchman I ever met. Why don't you go home and settle down and marry? — and keep that phiz of yours out of the newspapers? Sometimes I think you're as crazy as a bug."

"An opinion shared by many. Maybe I am. I dash in where lunatics fear to tread.

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Come on over to the Soufflet and have a drink with me."

"I'm not drinking to-day," tersely.
"There's too much ahead for me to do."

"Going to start out to find her? Oh, Sir Galahad!" ironically. "Abby, you used to be a sport. I'll wager a hundred against a bottle of pop that to-morrow or next day she'll turn up serenely, with the statement that she was indisposed, sorry not to have notified the directors, and all that. They do it repeatedly every season."

"But an errand of mercy, the strange automobile which can not be found? The engagement to dine with the Barone? Celeste Fournier's statement? You can't get around these things. I tell you, Nora isn't that kind. She's too big in heart and mind to stoop to any such devices," vehemently.

"Nora! That looks pretty serious, Abby. You haven't gone and made a fool of yourself, have you?"

"What do you call making a fool of myself?" truculently.

"You aren't a suitor, are you? An accepted suitor?" unruffled, rather kindly.

"No, but I would to heaven that I were!" Abbott jammed the newspaper into his pocket and slung the stool over his arm. "Come on over to the studio until I get some money."

"You are really going to start a search?"

"I really am. I'd start one just as quickly for you, if I heard that you had vanished under mysterious circumstances."

"I believe you honestly would."

"You are an old misanthrope. I hope some woman puts the hook into you some day. Where did you pick up the grouch? Some of your dusky princesses give you the go-by?"

"You, too, Abby?"

"Oh, rot! Of course I never believed any of that twaddle. Only, I've got a sore head to-day. If you knew Nora as well as I do, you'd understand."

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Courtlandt walked on a little ahead of the artist, who looked up and down the athletic form, admiringly. Sometimes he loved the man, sometimes he hated him. He marched through tragedy and comedy and thrilling adventure with no more concern that he evinced in striding through these gardens. Nearly every one had heard of his exploits; but who among them knew anything of the real man, so adroitly hidden under unruffled externals? That there was a man he did not know, hiding deep down within those powerful shoulders, he had not the least doubt. He himself possessed the quick mobile temperament of the artist, and he could penetrate but not understand the poise assumed with such careless ease by his friend. Dutch blood had something to do with it, and there was breeding, but there was something more than these: he was a reversion, perhaps, to the type of man which had made the rovers of the Lowlands feared on land and sea, now hemmed in by conven-

tion, hampered by the barriers of progress, and striving futilely to find an outlet for his peculiar energies. One bit of knowledge gratified him; he stood nearer to Courtlandt than any other man. He had known the adventurer as a boy, and long separations had in no-wise impaired the foundations of this friendship.

Courtlandt continued toward the exit, his head forward, his gaze bent on the path. He had the air of a man deep in thought, philosophic thought, which leaves the brows unmarred by those corrugations known as frowns. Yet his thoughts were far from philosophic. Indeed, his soul was in mad turmoil. He could have thrown his arms toward the blue sky and cursed aloud the fates that had set this new tangle at his feet. He longed for the jungles and some mad beast to vent his wrath upon. But he gave no sign. He had returned with a purpose as hard and grim as iron; and no obstacle, less powerful than

death, should divert or control him. Abduction? Let the public believe what it might; he held the key to the mystery. She was afraid, and had taken flight. So be it.

"I say, Ted," called out the artist, "what did you mean by saying that you were a Dutchman?"

Courtlandt paused so that Abbott might catch up to him. "I said that I was a Dutchman?"

"Yes. And it has just occurred to me that you meant something."

"Oh, yes. You were talking of Da Toscana? Let's call her Harrigan. It will save time, and no one will know to whom we refer. You said she was Irish, and that when she said a thing she meant it. My boy, the Irish are notorious for claiming that. They often say it before they see clearly. Now, we Dutchmen,—it takes a long time for us to make up our minds, but when we do, something has got to bend or break."

"You don't mean to say that you are going to settle down and get married?"

"I'm not going to settle down and get married, if that will ease your mind any."

"Man, I was hoping!"

"Three meals a day in the same house, with the same woman, never appealed to me."

"What do you want, one for each meal?"

"There's the dusky princess peeking out again. The truth is, Abby, if I could hide myself for three or four years, long enough for people to forget me, I might reconsider. But it should be under another name. They envy us millionaires. Why, we are the loneliest duffers going. We distrust every one; we fly when a woman approaches; we become monomaniacs; one thing obsesses us, everybody is after our money. We want friends, we want wives, but we want them to be attracted to us and not to our money-bags. Oh, pshaw! What plans have you made in regard to the search?"

Gloom settled upon the artist's face. "I've got to find out what's happened to her, Ted. This isn't any play. Why, she loves the part of Marguerite as she loves nothing else. She's been kidnaped, and only God knows for what reason. It has knocked me silly. I just came up from Como, where she spends the summers now. I was going to take her and Fournier out to dinner."

"Who's Fournier?"

"Mademoiselle Fournier, the composer. She goes with Nora on the yearly concert tours."

"Pretty?"

"Charming."

"I see," thoughtfully. "What part of the lake; the Villa d'Este, Cadenabbia?"

"Bellaggio. Oh, it was ripping last summer. She's always singing when she's happy. When she sings out on the terrace, suddenly, without giving any one warning, her voice is

wonderful. No audience ever heard anything like it."

"I heard her Friday night. I dropped in at the Opera without knowing what they were singing. I admit all you say in regard to her voice and looks; but I stick to the whim."

"But you can't fake that chap with the blond mustache," retorted Abbott grimly. "Lord, I wish I had run into you any day but to-day. I'm all in. I can telephone to the Opera from the studio, and then we shall know for a certainty whether or not she will return for the performance to-night. If not, then I'm going in for a little detective work."

"Abby, it will turn out to be the sheep of Little Bo-Peep."

"Have your own way about it."

When they arrived at the studio Abbott telephoned promptly. Nothing had been heard. They were substituting another singer.

"Call up the *Herald*," suggested Courtlandt.

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Abbott did so. And he had to answer innumerable questions, questions which worked him into a fine rage: who was he, where did he live, what did he know, how long had he been in Paris, and could he prove that he had arrived that morning? Abbott wanted to fling the receiver into the mouth of the transmitter, but his patience was presently rewarded. The singer had not yet been found, but the chauffeur of the mysterious car had turned up . . . in a hospital, and perhaps by night they would know everything. The chauffeur had had a bad accident; the car itself was a total wreck, in a ditch, not far from Versailles.

"There!" cried Abbott, slamming the receiver on the hook. "What do you say to that?"

"The chauffeur may have left her somewhere, got drunk afterward, and plunged into the ditch. Things have happened like that. Abby, don't make a camel's-hair shirt out of

your paint-brushes. What a pother about a singer! If it had been a great inventor, a poet, an artist, there would have been nothing more than a two-line paragraph. But an opera-singer, one who entertains us during our idle evenings — ha! that's a different matter. Set instantly that great municipal machinery called the police in action; sell extra editions on the streets. What ado!"

"What the devil makes *you* so bitter?"

"Was I bitter? I thought I was philosophizing." Courtlandt consulted his watch. Half after four. "Come over to the Maurice and dine with me to-morrow night, that is, if you do not find your *prima donna*. I've an engagement at five-thirty, and must be off."

"I was about to ask you to dine with me to-night," disappointedly.

"Can't; awfully sorry, Abby. It was only luck that I met you in the Luxembourg. Be over about seven. I was very glad to see you again."

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Abbott kicked a broken easel into a corner. "All right. If anything turns up I'll let you know. You're at the Grand?"

"Yes. By-by."

"I know what's the matter with him," mused the artist, alone. "Some woman has chucked him. Silly little fool, probably."

Courtlandt went down-stairs and out into the boulevard. Frankly, he was beginning to feel concerned. He still held to his original opinion that the diva had disappeared of her own free will; but if the machinery of the police had been started, he realized that his own safety would eventually become involved. By this time, he reasoned, there would not be a hotel in Paris free of surveillance. Naturally, blond strangers would be in demand. The complications that would follow his own arrest were not to be ignored. He agreed with his conscience that he had not acted with dignity in forcing his way into her apartment. But that night he had been at odds with con-

vention; his spirit had been that of the marauding old Dutchman of the seventeenth century. He perfectly well knew that she was in the right as far as the pistol-shot was concerned. Further, he knew that he could quash any charge she might make in that direction by the simplest of declarations; and to avoid this simplest of declarations she would prefer silence above all things. They knew each other tolerably well.

It was extremely fortunate that he had not been to the hotel since Saturday. He went directly to the war-office. The great and powerful man there was the only hope left. They had met some years before in Algiers, where Courtlandt had rendered him a very real service.

"I did not expect you to the minute," the great man said pleasantly. "You will not mind waiting for a few minutes."

"Not in the least. Only, I'm in a deuce of a mess," frankly and directly. "Innocently

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enough, I've stuck my head into the police net."

"Is it possible that now I can pay my debt to you?"

"Such as it is. Have you read the article in the newspapers regarding the disappearance of Signorina da Toscana, the singer?"

"Yes."

"I am the unknown blond. To-morrow morning I want you to go with me to the prefecture and state that I was with you all of Saturday and Sunday; that on Monday you and your wife dined with me, that yesterday we went to the aviation meet, and later to the Odéon."

"In brief, an alibi?" smiling now.

"Exactly. I shall need one."

"And a perfectly good alibi. But I have your word that you are in nowise concerned? Pardon the question, but between us it is really necessary if I am to be of service to you."

"On my word as a gentleman."

"That is sufficient."

"In fact, I do not believe that she has been abducted at all. Will you let me use your pad and pen for a minute?"

The other pushed over the required articles. Courtlandt scrawled a few words and passed back the pad.

"For me to read?"

"Yes," moodily.

The Frenchman read. Courtlandt watched him anxiously. There was not even a flicker of surprise in the official eye. Calmly he ripped off the sheet and tore it into bits, distributing the pieces into the various wastebaskets yawning about his long flat desk. Next, still avoiding the younger man's eye, he arranged his papers neatly and locked them up in a huge safe which only the artillery of the German army could have forced. He then called for his hat and stick. He beckoned to Courtlandt to follow. Not a word was said

until the car was humming on the road to Vincennes.

"Well?" said Courtlandt, finally. It was not possible for him to hold back the question any longer.

"My dear friend, I am taking you out to the villa for the night."

"But I have nothing . . ."

"And I have everything, even foresight. If you were arrested to-night it would cause you some inconvenience. I am fifty-six, some twenty years your senior. Under this hat of mine I carry a thousand secrets, and every one of these thousand must go to the grave with me, yours along with them. I have met you a dozen times since those Algerian days, and never have you failed to afford me some amusement or excitement. You are the most interesting and entertaining young man I know. Try one of these cigars."

Precisely at the time Courtlandt stepped

into the automobile outside the war-office, a scene, peculiar in character, but inconspicuous in that it did not attract attention, was enacted in the Gare de l'Est. Two sober-visaged men stood respectfully aside to permit a tall young man in a Bavarian hat to enter a compartment of the second-class. What could be seen of the young man's face was full of smothered wrath and disappointment. How he hated himself, for his weakness, for his cowardice! He was not all bad. Knowing that he was being watched and followed, he could not go to Versailles and compromise her, uselessly. And devil take the sleek demon of a woman who had prompted him to commit so base an act!

"You will at least," he said, "deliver that message which I have intrusted to your care."

"It shall reach Versailles to-night, your Highness."

The young man reread the telegram which one of the two men had given him a moment

since. It was a command which even he, wilful and disobedient as he was, dared not ignore. He ripped it into shreds and flung them out of the window. He did not apologize to the man into whose face the pieces flew. That gentleman reddened perceptibly, but he held his tongue. The blare of a horn announced the time of departure. The train moved. The two men on the platform saluted, but the young man ignored the salutation. Not until the rear car disappeared in the hazy distance did the watchers stir. Then they left the station and got into the tonneau of a touring-car, which shot away and did not stop until it drew up before that imposing embassy upon which the French will always look with more or less suspicion.

CHAPTER VI

THE BIRD BEHIND BARS

THE most beautiful blue Irish eyes in the world gazed out at the dawn which turned night-blue into day-blue and paled the stars. Rosal lay the undulating horizon, presently to burst into living flame, transmuting the dull steel bars of the window into fairy gold, that trick of alchemy so futilely sought by man. There was a window at the north and another at the south, likewise barred; but the Irish eyes never sought these two. It was from the east window only that they could see the long white road that led to Paris.

The nightingale was truly caged. But the wild heart of the eagle beat in this nightingale's breast, and the eyes burned as fiercely toward the east as the east burned toward the

west. Sunday and Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday, to-day; and that the five dawns were singular in beauty and that she had never in her life before witnessed the creation of five days, one after another, made no impression upon her sense of the beautiful, so delicate and receptive in ordinary times. She was conscious that within her the cup of wrath was overflowing. Of other things, such as eating and sleeping and moving about in her cage (more like an eagle indeed than a nightingale), recurrence had blunted her perception.

Her clothes were soiled and crumpled, sundrily torn; her hair was in disorder, and tendrils hung about her temples and forehead — thick black hair, full of purple tones in the sunlight — for she had not surrendered peacefully to this incarceration. Dignity, that phase of philosophy which accepts quietly the inevitable, she had thrown to the winds. She had fought desperately, primordially, when

she had learned that her errand of mercy was nothing more than a cruel hoax.

"Oh, but he shall pay, he shall pay!" she murmured, striving to loosen the bars with her small, white, helpless hands. The cry seemed to be an arietta, for through all these four maddening days she had voiced it,—now low and deadly with hate, now full-toned in burning anger, now broken by sobs of despair. "Will you never come, so that I may tell you how base and vile you are?" she further addressed the east.

She had waited for his appearance on Sunday. Late in the day one of the jailers had informed her that it was impossible for the gentleman to come before Monday. So she marshaled her army of phrases, of accusations, of denunciations, ready to smother him with them the moment he came. But he came not Monday, nor Tuesday, nor Wednesday. The suspense was to her mind diabolical. She began to understand: he intended to keep

her there till he was sure that her spirit was broken, then he would come. Break her spirit? She laughed wildly. He could break her spirit no more easily than she could break these bars. To bring her to Versailles upon an errand of mercy! Well, he was capable of anything.

The room was large and fairly comfortable, but contained nothing breakable, having been tenanted at one time by a strenuous lunatic, who had considerably died after his immediate family and relations had worn themselves into their several graves, taking care of him. But Eleonora Harrigan knew nothing of the history of the room while she occupied it. So, no ghost disturbed her restless slumberless nights, consumed in watching and listening.

She was not particularly distressed because she knew that it would not be possible for her to sing again until the following winter in New York. She had sobbed too much, with

her face buried in the pillow. Had these sobs been born of weakness, all might have been well; but rage had mothered them, and thus her voice was in a very bad way. This morning she was noticeably hoarse, and there was a break in the arietta. No, she did not fret over this side of the calamity. The sting of it all lay in the fact that she had been outraged in the matter of personal liberty, with no act of reprisal to ease her immediate longing to be avenged.

Nora, as she stood in the full morning sunlight, was like to gladden the eyes of all mankind. She was beautiful, and all adjectives applicable would but serve to confuse rather than to embellish her physical excellence. She was as beautiful as a garden rose is, needing no defense, no ramparts of cloying phrases. The day of poets is gone, otherwise she would have been sung in cantos. She was tall, shapely, deep-bosomed, fine-skinned. Critics, in praising her charms, delved into mythology

and folk-lore for comparisons, until there wasn't a goddess left on Olympus or on Northland's icy capes; and when these images became a little shop-worn, referred to certain masterpieces of the old fellows who had left nothing more to be said in oils. Nora enjoyed it all.

She had not been happy in the selection of her stage name; but she had chosen Eleonora da Toscana because she believed there was good luck in it. Once, long before the world knew of her, she had returned home from Italy unexpectedly. "Molly, here's Nora, from Tuscany!" her delighted father had cried: who at that time had a nebulous idea that Tuscany was somewhere in Ireland because it had a Celtic ring to it. Being filled with love of Italy, its tongue, its history, its physical beauty, she naïvely translated "Nora from Tuscany" into Italian, and declared that when she went upon the stage she would be known by that name. There had been some smiling over the pseudo-

nym; but Nora was Irish enough to cling to it. By and by the great music-loving public ceased to concern itself about her name; it was her fresh beauty and her wonderful voice they craved to see and hear. Kings and queens, emperors and empresses, princes and princesses,—what is called royalty and nobility in the newspapers freely gave her homage. Quite a rise in the world for a little girl who had once lived in a shabby apartment in New York and run barefooted on the wet asphalts, summer nights!

But Nora was not recalling the happy scenes of her childhood; indeed, no; she was still threatening Paris. Once there, she would not lack for reprisals. To have played on her pity! To have made a lure of her tender concern for the unfortunate! Never would she forgive such baseness. And only a little while ago she had been as happy as the nightingale to which they compared her. Never had she wronged any one; she had been kindness and thoughtfulness to all with whom she had come

in contact. But from now on! . . . Her fingers tightened round the bars. She might have posed as Dido when she learned that the noble Æneas was dead. War, war; woe to the moths who fluttered about her head hereafter!

Ah, but had she been happy? Her hands slid down the bars. Her expression changed. The mouth drooped, the eagle-light in her eyes dimmed. From out the bright morning, somewhere, had come weariness, and with this came weakness, and finally, tears.

She heard the key turn in the lock. They had never come so early before. She was astonished to see that her jailer did not close the door as usual. He put down the breakfast tray on the table. There was tea and toast and fruit.

"Mademoiselle, there has been a terrible mistake," said the man humbly.

"Ah! So you have found that out?" she cried.

"Yes. You are not the person for whom this room was intended." Which was half a truth and perfectly true, paradoxical as it may seem. "Eat your breakfast in peace. You are free, Mademoiselle."

"Free? You will not hinder me if I walk through that door?"

"No, Mademoiselle. On the contrary, I shall be very glad, and so will my brother, who guards you at night. I repeat, there has been a frightful mistake. Monsieur Champeaux . . ."

"Monsieur Champeaux!" Nora was bewildered. She had never heard this name before.

"He calls himself that," was the diplomatic answer.

All Nora's suspicions took firm ground again. "Will you describe this Monsieur Champeaux to me?" asked the actress coming into life.

"He is short, dark, and old, Mademoiselle."

"Rather is he not tall, blond, and young?" ironically.

The jailer concealed what annoyance he felt. In his way he was just as capable an actor as she was. The accuracy of her description startled him; for the affair had been carried out so adroitly that he had been positive that until her real captor appeared she would be totally in the dark regarding his identity. And here she had hit it off in less than a dozen words. Oh, well; it did not matter now. She might try to make it unpleasant for his employer, but he doubted the ultimate success of her attempts. However, the matter was at an end as far as he was concerned.

"Have you thought what this means? It is abduction. It is a crime you have committed, punishable by long imprisonment."

"I have been Mademoiselle's jailer, not her abductor. And when one is poor and in need of money!" He shrugged.

"I will give you a thousand francs for the

name and address of the man who instigated this outrage."

Ah, he thought: then she wasn't so sure? "I told you the name, Mademoiselle. As for his address, I dare not give it, not for ten thousand francs. Besides, I have said that there has been a mistake."

"For whom have I been mistaken?"

"Who but Monsieur Champeaux's wife, Mademoiselle, who is not in her right mind?" with inimitable sadness.

"Very well," said Nora. "You say that I am free. That is all I want, freedom."

"In twenty minutes the electric tram leaves for Paris. You will recall, Mademoiselle," humbly, "that we have taken nothing belonging to you. You have your purse and hat and cloak. The struggle was most unfortunate. But, think, Mademoiselle, think; we thought you to be insane!"

"Permit me to doubt that! And you are not afraid to let me go?"

"Not in the least, Mademoiselle. A mistake has been made, and in telling you to go at once, we do our best to rectify this mistake. It is only five minutes to the tram. A carriage is at the door. Will Mademoiselle be pleased to remember that we have treated her with the utmost courtesy?"

"I shall remember everything," ominously.

"Very good, Mademoiselle. You will be in Paris before nine." With this he bowed and backed out of the room as though Nora had suddenly made a distinct ascension in the scale of importance.

"Wait!" she called.

His face appeared in the doorway again.

"Do you know who I am?"

"Since this morning, Mademoiselle."

"That is all."

Free! Her veins tingled with strange exultation. He had lost his courage and had become afraid of the consequences. Free! Monsieur Champeaux indeed! Cowardice

was a new development in his character. He had been afraid to come. She drank the tea, but did not touch the toast or fruit. There would be time enough for breakfast when she arrived in Paris. Her hands trembled violently as she pinned on her hat, and she was not greatly concerned as to the angle. She snatched up her purse and cloak, and sped out into the street. A phaeton awaited her.

"The tram," she said.

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"And go quickly." She would not feel safe until she was in the tram.

A face appeared at one of the windows. As the vehicle turned the corner, the face vanished; and perhaps that particular visage disappeared forever. A gray wig came off, the little gray side-whiskers, the bushy grey eyebrows, revealing a clever face, not more than thirty, cunning, but humorously cunning and anything but scoundrelly. The painted scar aslant the nose was also obliterated. With

haste the man thrust the evidences of disguise into a traveling-bag, ran here and there through the rooms, all bare and unfurnished save the one with the bars and the kitchen, which contained two cots and some cooking utensils. Nothing of importance had been left behind. He locked the door and ran all the way to the Place d'Armes, catching the tram to Paris by a fraction of a minute.

All very well done. She would be in Paris before the police made any definite move. The one thing that disturbed him was the thought of the blockhead of a chauffeur, who had got drunk before his return from Versailles. If he talked; well, he could say nothing beyond the fact that he had deposited the singer at the house as directed. He knew positively nothing.

The man laughed softly. A thousand francs apiece for him and Antoine, and no possible chance of being discovered. Let the police find the house in Versailles; let them

trace whatever paths they found; the agent would tell them, and honestly, that an aged man had rented the house for a month and had paid him in advance. What more could the agent say? Only one bit of puzzlement: why hadn't the blond stranger appeared? Who was he, in truth, and what had been his game? All this waiting and wondering, and then a curt telegram of the night before, saying, "Release her." So much the better. What his employer's motives were did not interest him half so much as the fact that he had a thousand francs in his pocket, and that all element of danger had been done away with. True, the singer herself would move heaven and earth to find out who had been back of the abduction. Let her make her accusations. He was out of it.

He glanced toward the forward part of the tram. There she sat, staring at the white road ahead. A young Frenchman sat near her, curling his mustache desperately. So beauti-

ful and all alone! At length he spoke to her. She whirled upon him so suddenly that his hat fell off his head and rolled at the feet of the onlooker.

"Your hat, Monsieur?" he said gravely, returning it.

Nora laughed maliciously. The author of the abortive flirtation fled down to the body of the tram.

And now there was no one on top but Nora and her erstwhile jailer, whom she did not recognize in the least.

"Mademoiselle," said the great policeman soberly, "this is a grave accusation to make."

"I make it, nevertheless," replied Nora. She sat stiffly in her chair, her face colorless, dark circles under her eyes. She never looked toward Courtlandt.

"But Monsieur Courtlandt has offered an alibi such as we can not ignore. More than that, his integrity is vouched for by the gentle-

man at his side, whom doubtless Mademoiselle recognizes."

Nora eyed the great man doubtfully.

"What is the gentleman to you?" she was interrogated.

"Absolutely nothing," contemptuously.

The minister inspected his rings.

"He has annoyed me at various times," continued Nora; "that is all. And his actions on Friday night warrant every suspicion I have entertained against him."

The chief of police turned toward the bandaged chauffeur. "You recognize the gentleman?"

"No, Monsieur, I never saw him before. It was an old man who engaged me."

"Go on."

"He said that Mademoiselle's old teacher was very ill and asked for assistance. I left Mademoiselle at the house and drove away. I was hired from the garage. That is the truth, Monsieur."

Nora smiled disbelievingly. Doubtless he had been paid well for that lie.

"And you?" asked the chief of Nora's chauffeur.

"He is certainly the gentleman, Monsieur, who attempted to bribe me."

"That is true," said Courtlandt with utmost calmness.

"Mademoiselle, if Monsieur Courtlandt wished, he could accuse you of attempting to shoot him."

"It was an accident. His sudden appearance in my apartment frightened me. Besides, I believe a woman who lives comparatively alone has a legal and moral right to protect herself from such unwarrantable intrusions. I wish him no physical injury, but I am determined to be annoyed by him no longer."

The minister's eyes sought Courtlandt's face obliquely. Strange young man, he thought. From the expression of his face he might have been a spectator rather than the person most

vitality concerned in this little scene. And what a pair they made!

"Monsieur Courtlandt, you will give me your word of honor not to annoy Mademoiselle again?"

"I promise never to annoy her again."

For the briefest moment the blazing blue eyes clashed with the calm brown ones. The latter were first to deviate from the line. It was not agreeable to look into a pair of eyes burning with the hate of one's self. Perhaps this conflagration was intensified by the placidity of his gaze. If only there had been some sign of anger, of contempt, anything but this incredible tranquillity against which she longed to cry out! She was too wrathful to notice the quickening throb of the veins on his temples.

"Mademoiselle, I find no case against Monsieur Courtlandt, unless you wish to appear against him for his forcible entrance to your apartment." Nora shook her head. The chief

of police stroked his mustache to hide the fleeting smile. A peculiar case, the like of which had never before come under his scrutiny! "Circumstantial evidence, we know, points to him; but we have also an alibi which is incontestable. We must look elsewhere for your abductors. Think; have you not some enemy? Is there no one who might wish you worry and inconvenience? Are your associates all loyal to you? Is there any jealousy?"

"No, none at all, Monsieur," quickly and decidedly.

"In my opinion, then, the whole affair is a hoax, perpetrated to vex and annoy you. The old man who employed this chauffeur may not have been old. I have looked upon all sides of the affair, and it begins to look like a practical joke, Mademoiselle."

"Ah!" angrily. "And am I to have no redress? Think of the misery I have gone through, the suspense! My voice is gone. I shall not be able to sing again for months. Is

it your suggestion that I drop the investigation?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, for it does not look as if we could get anywhere with it. If you insist, I will hold Monsieur Courtlandt; but I warn you the magistrate would not hesitate to dismiss the case instantly. Monsieur Courtlandt arrived in Marseilles Thursday morning; he reached Paris Friday morning. Since arriving in Paris he has fully accounted for his time. It is impossible that he could have arranged for the abduction. Still, if you say, I can hold him for entering your apartment."

"That would be but a farce." Nora rose. "Monsieur, permit me to wish you good day. For my part, I shall pursue this matter to the end. I believe this gentleman guilty, and I shall do my best to prove it. I am a woman, and all alone. When a man has powerful friends, it is not difficult to build an alibi."

"That is a reflection upon my word, Mademoiselle," quietly interposed the minister.

"Monsieur has been imposed upon." Nora walked to the door.

"Wait a moment, Mademoiselle," said the prefect. "Why do you insist upon prosecuting him for something of which he is guiltless, when you could have him held for something of which he is really guilty?"

"The one is trivial; the other is a serious outrage. Good morning." The attendant closed the door behind her.

"A very determined young woman," mused the chief of police.

"Exceedingly," agreed the minister.

Courtlandt got up wearily. But the chief motioned him to be reseated.

"I do not say that I dare not pursue my investigations; but now that mademoiselle is safely returned, I prefer not to."

"May I ask who made this request?" asked Courtlandt.

"Request? Yes, Monsieur, it was a request not to proceed further."

"From where?"

"As to that, you will have to consult the head of the state. I am not at liberty to make the disclosure."

The minister leaned forward eagerly. "Then there is a political side to it?"

"There would be if everything had not turned out so fortunately."

"I believe that I understand now," said Courtlandt, his face hardening. Strange, he had not thought of it before. His skepticism had blinded him to all but one angle. "Your advice to drop the matter is excellent."

The chief of police elevated his brows interrogatively.

"For I presume," continued Courtlandt, rising, "that Mademoiselle's abductor is by this time safely across the frontier."

CHAPTER VII

BATTLING JIMMIE

THERE is a heavenly terrace, flanked by marvelous trees. To the left, far down below, is a curving, dark-shaded, turquoise body of water called Lecco; to the right there lies the queen of lakes, the crown of Italy, a corn-flower sapphire known as Como. Over and about it — this terrace — poets have raved and tousled their neglected locks in vain to find the perfect phrasing; novelists have come and gone and have carried away peace and inspiration; and painters have painted it from a thousand points of view, and perhaps are painting it from another thousand this very minute. It is the Place of Honeymoons. Rich lovers come and idle there; and lovers of modest means rush up to it and down from

it to catch the next steamer to Menaggio. Eros was not born in Greece: of all barren mountains, unstirring, Hymettus, or Olympus, or whatever they called it in the days of the junketing gods, is completest. No; Venus went a-touring and abode a while upon this same gracious spot, once dear to Pliny the younger.

Between the blessed ledge and the towering mountains over the way, rolls a small valley, caressed on either side by the lakes. There are flower gardens, from which in summer rises the spicy perfume of lavender; there are rows upon rows of grape-vines, terraced downward; there are purple figs and white and ruby mulberries. Around and about, rising sheer from the waters, wherever the eye may rove, heaven-touching, salmon-tinted mountains abound, with scarfs of filmy cloud aslant their rugged profiles, and beauty-patches of snow. And everywhere the dark and brooding cypress, the copper beech, the green pine

accentuate the pink and blue and white stucco of the villas, the rich and the humble.

Behind the terrace is a promontory, three or four hundred feet above the waters. Upon the crest is a cultivated forest of all known evergreens. There are ten miles of cool and fragrant paths, well trodden by the devotees of Eros. The call of love is heard here; the echoes to-day reverberate with the impassioned declarations of yesterday. The Englishman's reserve melts, the American forgets his coupons, the German puts his arm around the robust waist of his frau or fräulein. (This is nothing for him; he does it unconcernedly up and down the great urban highways of the world.)

Again, between the terrace ledge and the forest lies a square of velvet green, abounding in four-leaf clover. *Buona fortuna!* In the center there is a fountain. The water tinkles in drops. One hears its soft music at all times. Along the terrace parapet are tea-

tables; a monster oak protects one from the sun. If one (or two) lingers over tea and cakes, one may witness the fiery lances of the setting sun burn across one arm of water while the silver spars of the rising moon shimmer across the other. Nature is whole-souled here; she gives often and freely and all she has.

Seated on one of the rustic benches, his white tennis shoes resting against the lower iron of the railing, a Bavarian dachel snoozing comfortably across his knees, was a man of fifty. He was broad of shoulder, deep of chest, and clean-shaven. He had laid aside his Panama hat, and his hair was clipped closely, and was pleasantly and honorably sprinkled with gray. His face was broad and tanned; the nose was tilted, and the wide mouth was both kindly and humorous. One knew, from the tint of his blue eyes and the quirk of his lips, that when he spoke there would be a bit of brogue. He was James

Harrigan, one time celebrated in the ring for his gameness, his squareness, his endurance; "Battling Jimmie" Harrigan, who, when he encountered his first knock-out, retired from the ring. He had to his credit sixty-one battles, of which he had easily won forty. He had been outpointed in some and had broken even in others; but only once had he been "railroaded into dreamland", to use the parlance of the game. That was enough. He understood. Youth would be served, and he was no longer young. He had, unlike the many in his peculiar service, lived cleanly and with wisdom and foresight: he had saved both his money and his health. To-day he was at peace with the world, with three sound appetites the day and the wherewithal to gratify them.

True, he often dreamed of the old days, the roped square, the lights, the haze of tobacco smoke, the white patches surrounding, all of a certain expectant tilt, the reporters scribbling

on the deal tables under the very posts, the cheers as he took his corner and scraped his shoes in the powdered resin, the padded gloves thrown down in the center of the canvas which was already scarred and soiled by the preliminaries. But never, never again; if only for the little woman's sake. Only when the game was done did he learn with what terror and dread she had waited for his return on fighting nights.

To-day "Battling Jimmie" was forgotten by the public, and he was happy in the seclusion of this forgetfulness. A new and strange career had opened up before him: he was the father of the most beautiful prima donna in the operatic world, and, difficult as the task was, he did his best to live up to it. It was hard not to offer to shake hands when he was presented to a princess or a duchess; it was hard to remember when to change the studs in his shirt; and a white cravat was the terror of his nights, for his fingers, broad and

stubby and powerful, had not been trained to the delicate task of tying a bow-knot. By a judicious blow in that spot where the ribs divaricate he could right well tie his adversary into a bow-knot, but this string of white lawn was a most damnable thing. Still, the puttering of the two women, their daily concern over his deportment, was bringing him into conformity with social usages. That he naturally despised the articles of such a soulless faith was evident in his constant inclination to play hooky. One thing he rebelled against openly, and with such firmness that the women did not press him too strongly for fear of a general revolt. On no occasion, however impressive, would he wear a silk hat. Christmas and birthdays invariably called forth the gift of a silk hat, for the women trusted that they could overcome resistance by persistence. He never said anything, but it was noticed that the hotel porter, or the gardener, or whatever masculine head (save

his own) was available, came forth resplendent on feast-days and Sundays.

Leaning back in an iron chair, with his shoulders resting against the oak, was another man, altogether a different type. He was frowning over the pages of Bagot's *Italian Lakes*, and he wasn't making much headway. He was Italian to the core, for all that he aped the English style and manner. He could speak the tongue with fluency, but he stumbled and faltered miserably over the soundless type. His clothes had the Piccadilly cut, and his mustache, erstwhile waxed and militant, was cropped at the corners, thoroughly insular. He was thirty, and undeniably handsome.

Near the fountain, on the green, was a third man. He was in the act of folding up an easel and a camp-stool.

The tea-drinkers had gone. It was time for the first bell for dinner. The villa's omnibus was toiling up the winding road among the

grape-vines. Suddenly Harrigan tilted his head sidewise, and the long silken ears of the dachel stirred. The Italian slowly closed his book and permitted his chair to settle on its four legs. The artist stood up from his paint-box. From a window in the villa came a voice; only a lilt of a melody, no words,—half a dozen bars from *Martha*; but every delightful note went deep into the three masculine hearts. Harrigan smiled and patted the dog. The Italian scowled at the vegetable garden directly below. The artist scowled at the Italian.

“Fritz, Fritz; here, Fritz!”

The dog struggled in Harrigan's hands and tore himself loose. He went clattering over the path toward the villa and disappeared into the doorway. Nothing could keep him when that voice called. He was as ardent a lover as any, and far more favored.

“Oh, you funny little dog! You merry

little dachel! Fritz, mustn't; let go!" Silence.

The artist knew that she was cuddling the puppy to her heart, and his own grew twisted. He stooped over his materials again and tied the box to the easel and the stool, and shifted them under his arm.

"I'll be up after dinner, Mr. Harrigan," he said.

"All right, Abbott." Harrigan waved his hand pleasantly. He was becoming so used to the unvarying statement that Abbott would be up after dinner, that his reply was by now purely mechanical. "She's getting her voice back all right; eh?"

"Beautifully! But I really don't think she ought to sing at the Haines' villa Sunday."

"One song won't hurt her. She's made up her mind to sing. There's nothing for us to do but to sit tight. No news from Paris?"

"No."

"Say, do you know what I think?"

"What?"

"Some one has come across to the police."

"Paris is not New York, Mr. Harrigan."

"Oh, I don't know. There's a hundred cents to the dollar, my boy, Paris or New York. Why haven't they moved? They can't tell me that tow-headed chap's alibi was on the level. I wish I'd been in Paris. There'd been something doing. And who was he? They refuse to give his name. And I can't get a word out of Nora. Shuts me up with a bang when I mention it. Throws her nerves all out, she says. I'd like to get my hands on the blackguard."

"So would I. It's a puzzle. If he had molested her while she was a captive, you could understand. But he never came near her."

"Busted his nerve, that's what."

"I have my doubts about that. A man who will go that far isn't subject to any derange-

ment of his nerves. Want me to bring up the checkers?"

"Sure. I've got two rubbers hanging over you."

The artist took the path that led around the villa and thence down by many steps to the village by the waterside, to the cream-tinted cluster of shops and enormous hotels.

The Italian was more fortunate. He was staying at the villa. He rose and sauntered over to Harrigan, who was always a source of interest to him. Study the man as he might, there always remained a profound mystery to his keen Italian mind. Every now and then nature — to prove that while she provided laws for humanity she obeyed none herself — nature produced the prodigy. Ancestry was nothing; habits, intelligence, physical appearance counted for naught. Harrigan was a fine specimen of the physical man, yes; but to be the father of a woman who was as beautiful as the legendary goddesses and who possessed a voice incom-

parable in the living history of music, here logic, the cold and accurate intruder, found an ununlockable door. He liked the ex-prize-fighter, so kindly and wholesome; but he also pitied him. Harrigan reminded him of a seal he had once seen in an aquarium tank: out of his element, but merry-eyed and swimming round and round as if determined to please everybody.

"It will be a fine night," said the Italian, pausing at Harrigan's bench.

"Every night is fine here, Barone," replied Harrigan. "Why, they had me up in Marienbad a few weeks ago, and I'm not over it yet. It's no place for a sick man; only a well man could come out of it alive."

The Barone laughed. Harrigan had told this tale half a dozen times, but each time the Barone felt called on to laugh. The man was her father.

"Do you know, Mr. Harrigan, Miss Harrigan is not herself? She is — what do you

call? — bitter. She laughs, but — ah, I do not know! — it sounds not real.”

“ Well, she isn’t over that rumpus in Paris yet.”

“ Rumpus? ”

“ The abduction.”

“ Ah, yes! Rumpus is another word for abduction? Yes, yes, I see.”

“ No, no! Rumpus is just a mix-up, a row, anything that makes a noise, calls in the police. You can make a rumpus on the piano, over a game of cards, anything.”

The Barone spread his hands. “ I comprehend,” hurriedly. He comprehended nothing, but he was too proud to admit it.

“ So Nora is not herself; a case of nerves. And to think that you called there at the apartment the very day! ”

“ Ah, if I had been there the right time! ”

“ But what puts me down for the count is the action of the fellow. Never showed up; just made her miss two performances.”

"He was afraid. Men who do cowardly things are always afraid." The Barone spoke with decided accent, but he seldom made a grammatical error. "But sometimes, too, men grow mad at once, and they do things in their madness. Ah, she is so beautiful! She is a nightingale." The Italian looked down on Como whose broad expanse was crisscrossed by rippled paths made by arriving and departing steamers. "It is not a wonder that some man might want to run away with her."

Harrigan looked curiously at the other. "Well, it won't be healthy for any man to try it again." The father held out his powerful hands for the Barone's inspection. They called mutely but expressively for the throat of the man who dared. "It'll never happen again. Her mother and I are not going away from her any more. When she sings in Berlin, I'm going to trail along; when she hits the high note in Paris, I'm lingering near; when she trills in London, I'm hiding in the shadow.

And you may put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"I smoke only cigarettes," replied the Barone gravely. It had been difficult to follow, this English.

Harrigan said nothing in return. He had given up trying to explain to the Italian the idiomatic style of old Broadway. He got up and brushed his flannels perfunctorily. "Well, I suppose I've got to dress for supper," resentfully. He still called it supper; and, as in the matter of the silk hat, his wife no longer strove to correct him. The evening meal had always been supper, and so it would remain until that time when he would cease to look forward to it.

"Do you go to the dancing at Cadenabbia to-night?"

"Me? I should say not!" Harrigan laughed. "I'd look like a bull in a china-shop. Abbott is coming up to play checkers with me. I'll leave the honors to you."

The Barone's face lighted considerably. He hated the artist only when he was visible. He was rather confused, however. Abbott had been invited to the dance. Why wasn't he going? Could it be true? Had the artist tried his luck and lost? Ah, if fate were as kind as that! He let Harrigan depart alone.

Why not? What did he care? What if the father had been a fighter for prizes? What if the mother was possessed with a misguided desire to shine socially? What mattered it if they had once resided in an obscure tenement in a great city, and that grandfathers were as far back as they could go with any certainty? Was he not his own master? What titled woman of his acquaintance whose forebears had been powerful in the days of the Borgias, was not dimmed in the presence of this wonderful maid to whom all things had been given unreservedly? Her brow was fit for a royal crown, let alone a simple baronial tiara such as he could provide.

The mother favored him a little; of this he was reasonably certain; but the moods of the daughter were difficult to discover or to follow.

To-night! The round moon was rising palely over Lecco; the moon, mistress of love and tides, toward whom all men and maids must look, though only Eros knows why! Evidently there was no answer to the Italian's question, for he faced about and walked moodily toward the entrance. Here he paused, looking up at the empty window. Again a snatch of song —

O sole mio . . . che bella soca . . . !

What a beautiful thing indeed! Passionately he longed for the old days, when by his physical prowess alone oft a man won his lady. Diplomacy, torrents of words, sly little tricks, subterfuges, adroitness, stolen glances, careless touches of the hand; by these must a maid be won to-day. When she was happy she sang, when she was sad, when she was only

mischievous. She was just as likely to sing *O terra addio* when she was happy as *O sole mio* when she was sad. So, how was a man to know the right approach to her variant moods? Sighing deeply, he went on to his room, to change his Piccadilly suit for another which was supposed to be the last word in the matter of evening dress.

Below, in the village, a man entered the Grand Hotel. He was tall, blond, rosy-cheeked. He carried himself like one used to military service; also, like one used to giving peremptory orders. The porter bowed, the director bowed, and the proprietor himself became a living carpenter's square, hinged. The porter and the director recognized a personage; the proprietor recognized the man. It was of no consequence that the new arrival called himself Herr Rosen. He was assigned to a suite of rooms, and on returning to the bureau, the proprietor squinted his eyes abstractedly. He knew every woman of impor-

tance at that time residing on the Point. Certainly it could be none of these. *Himmel!* He struck his hands together. So that was it: the singer. He recalled the hints in certain newspaper paragraphs, the little tales with the names left to the imagination. So that was it?

What a woman! Men looked at her and went mad. And not so long ago one had abducted her in Paris. The proprietor threw up his hands in despair. What was going to happen to the peace of this bucolic spot? The youth permitted nothing to stand in his way, and the singer's father was a retired fighter with boxing-gloves!

CHAPTER VIII

MOONLIGHT AND A PRINCE

WHEN he had fought what he considered two rattling rounds, Harrigan conceded that his cravat had once more got the decision over him on points. And the cravat was only a second-rater, too, a black-silk affair. He tossed up the sponge and went down to the dining-room, the ends of the conqueror straggling like the four points of a battered weather-vane. His wife and daughter and Mademoiselle Fournier were already at their table by the casement window, from which they could see the changing granite mask of Napoleon across Lecco.

At the villa there were seldom more than ten or twelve guests, this being quite the capacity of the little hotel. These generally

took refuge here in order to escape the noise and confusion of a large hotel, to avoid the necessity of dining in state every night. Few of the men wore evening dress, save on occasions when they were entertaining. The villa wasn't at all fashionable, and the run of American tourists fought shy of it, preferring the music and dancing and card-playing of the famous hostelrys along the water-front. Of course, everybody came up for the view, just as everybody went up the Gorner Grat (by cable) at Zermatt to see the Matterhorn. But for all its apparent dulness, there was always an English duchess, a Russian princess, or a lady from the Faubourg St.-Germain somewhere about, resting after a strenuous winter along the Riviera. Nora Harrigan sought it not only because she loved the spot, but because it sheltered her from idle curiosity. It was almost as if the villa were hers, and the other people her guests.

Harrigan crossed the room briskly, urged

by an appetite as sound as his views on life. The chef here was a king; there was always something to look forward to at the dinner hour; some new way of serving spinach, or lentils, or some irresistible salad. He smiled at every one and pulled out his chair.

"Sorry to keep you folks waiting."

"James!"

"What's the matter now?" he asked good-naturedly. Never that tone but something was out of kilter.

His wife glanced wrathfully at his feet. Wonderingly he looked down. In the heat of the battle with his cravat he had forgotten all about his tennis shoes.

"I see. No soup for mine." He went back to his room, philosophically. There was always something wrong when he got into these infernal clothes.

"Mother," said Nora, "why can't you let him be?"

"But white shoes!" in horror.

"Who cares? He's the patientest man I know. We're always nagging him, and I for one am going to stop. Look about! So few men and women dress for dinner. You do as you please here, and that is why I like it."

"I shall never be able to do anything with him as long as he sees that his mistakes are being condoned by you," bitterly responded the mother. "Some day he will humiliate us all by his carelessness."

"Oh, bother!" Nora's elbow slyly dug into Celeste's side.

The pianist's pretty face was bent over her soup. She had grown accustomed to these little daily rifts. For the great, patient, clumsy, happy-go-lucky man she entertained an intense pity. But it was not the kind that humiliates; on the contrary, it was of a mothering disposition; and the ex-gladiator dimly recognized it, and felt more comfortable with her than with any other woman excepting Nora. She understood him perhaps bet-

ter than either mother or daughter; he was too late: he belonged to a distant time, the beginning of the Christian era; and often she pictured him braving the net and the trident in the saffroned arena.

Mrs. Harrigan broke her bread vexatiously. Her husband refused to think for himself, and it was wearing on her nerves to watch him day and night. Deep down under the surface of new adjustments and social ambitions, deep in the primitive heart, he was still her man. But it was only when he limped with an occasional twinge of rheumatism, or a tooth ached, or he dallied with his meals, that the old love-instinct broke up through these artificial crustations. True, she never knew how often he invented these trivial ailments, for he soon came into the knowledge that she was less concerned about him when he was hale and hearty. She still retained evidences of a blossomy beauty. Abbott had once said truly that nature had experimented on her; it was

in the reproduction that perfection had been reached. To see the father, the mother, and the daughter together it was not difficult to fashion a theory as to the latter's splendid health and physical superiority. Arriving at this point, however, theory began to fray at the ends. No one could account for the genius and the voice. The mother often stood lost in wonder that out of an ordinary childhood, a barelegged, romping, hoydenish childhood, this marvel should emerge: her's!

She was very ambitious for her daughter. She wanted to see nothing less than a ducal coronet upon the child's brow, British preferred. If ordinary chorus girls and vaudeville stars, possessing only passable beauty and no intelligence whatever, could bring earls into their nets, there was no reason why Nora could not be a princess or a duchess. So she planned accordingly. But the child puzzled and eluded her; and from time to time she discovered a disquieting strength of char-

acter behind a disarming amiability. Ever since Nora had returned home by way of the Orient, the mother had recognized a subtle change, so subtle that she never had an opportunity of alluding to it verbally. Perhaps the fault lay at her own door. She should never have permitted Nora to come abroad alone to fill her engagements.

But that Nora was to marry a duke was, to her mind, a settled fact. It is a peculiar phase, this of the humble who find themselves, without effort of their own, thrust up among the great and the so-called, who forget whence they came in the fierce contest for supremacy upon that tottering ledge called society. The cad and the snob are only infrequently well-born. Mrs. Harrigan was as yet far from being a snob, but it required some tact upon Nora's part to prevent this dubious accomplishment.

"Is Mr. Abbott going with us?" she inquired.

"Donald is sulking," Nora answered. "For once the Barone got ahead of him in engaging the motor-boat."

"I wish you would not call him by his first name."

"And why not? I like him, and he is a very good comrade."

"You do not call the Barone by his given name."

"Heavens, no! If I did he would kiss me. These Italians will never understand western customs, mother. I shall never marry an Italian, much as I love Italy."

"Nor a Frenchman?" asked Celeste.

"Nor a Frenchman."

"I wish I knew if you meant it," sighed the mother.

"My dear, I have given myself to the stage. You will never see me being led to the altar."

"No, you will do the leading when the time comes," retorted the mother.

"Mother, the men I like you may count

upon the fingers of one hand. Three of them are old. For the rest, I despise men."

"I suppose some day you will marry some poverty-stricken artist," said the mother, filled with dark foreboding.

"You would not call Donald poverty-stricken."

"No. But you will never marry him."

"No. I never shall."

Celeste smoothed her hands, a little trick she had acquired from long hours spent at the piano. "He will make some woman a good husband."

"That he will."

"And he is most desperately in love with you."

"That's nonsense!" scoffed Nora. "He thinks he is. He ought to fall in love with you, Celeste. Every time you play the fourth *ballade* he looks as if he was ready to throw himself at your feet."

"*Pouf!* For ten minutes?" Celeste laughed bravely. "He leaves me quickly enough when you begin to sing."

"Glamour, glamour!"

"Well, I should not care for the article second-hand."

The arrival of Harrigan put an end to this dangerous trend of conversation. He walked in tight proper pumps, and sat down. He was only hungry now; the zest for dining was gone.

"Don't go sitting out in the night air, Nora," he warned.

"I sha'n't."

"And don't dance more than you ought to. Your mother would let you wear the soles off your shoes if she thought you were attracting attention. Don't do it."

"James, that is not true," the mother protested.

"Well, Molly, you do like to hear 'em talk.

I wish they knew how to cook a good club steak."

"I brought up a book from the village for you to-day," said Mrs. Harrigan, sternly.

"I'll bet a dollar it's on how to keep the creases in a fellow's pants."

"Trousers."

"Pants," helping himself to the last of the romaine. "What time do you go over?"

"At nine. We must be getting ready now," said Nora. "Don't wait up for us."

"And only one cigar," added the mother.

"Say, Molly, you keep closing in on me. Tobacco won't hurt me any, and I get a good deal of comfort out of it these days."

"Two," smiled Nora.

"But his heart!"

"And what in mercy's name is the matter with his heart? The doctor at Marienbad said that father was the soundest man of his age he had ever met." Nora looked quizzically at her father.

He grinned. Out of his own mouth he had been nicely trapped. That morning he had complained of a little twinge in his heart, a childish subterfuge to take Mrs. Harrigan's attention away from the eternal society page of the *Herald*. It had succeeded. He had even been cuddled.

"James, you told me . . ."

"Oh, Molly, I only wanted to talk to you."

"To do so it isn't necessary to frighten me to death," reproachfully. "One cigar, and no more."

"Molly, what ails you?" as they left the dining-room. "Nora's right. That sawbones said I was made of iron. I'm only smoking native cigars, and it takes a bunch of 'em to get the taste of tobacco. All right; in a few months you'll have me with the stuffed canary under the glass top. What's the name of that book?" diplomatically.

"*Social Usages*."

"Break away!"

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Nora laughed. "But, dad, you really must read it carefully. It will tell you how to talk to a duchess, if you chance to meet one when I am not around. It has all the names of the forks and knives and spoons, and it tells you never to use sugar on your lettuce." And then she threw her arm around her mother's waist. "Honey, when you buy books for father, be sure they are by Dumas or Haggard or Doyle. Otherwise he will never read a line."

"And I try so hard!" Tears came into Mrs. Harrigan's eyes.

"There, there, Molly, old girl!" soothed the outlaw. "I'll read the book. I know I'm a stupid old stumbling-block, but it's hard to teach an old dog new tricks, that is, at the ring of the gong. Run along to your party. And don't break any more hearts than you need, Nora."

Nora promised in good faith. But once in the ballroom, that little son of Satan called

malice-aforethought took possession of her; and there was havoc. If a certain American countess had not patronized her; if certain lorgnettes (implements of torture used by said son of Satan) had not been leveled in her direction; if certain fans had not been suggestively spread between pairs of feminine heads,—Nora would have been as harmless as a playful kitten.

From door to door of the ballroom her mother fluttered like a hen with a duckling. Even Celeste was disturbed, for she saw that Nora's conduct was not due to any light-hearted fun. There was something bitter and ironic cloaked by those smiles, that tinkle of laughter. In fact, Nora from Tuscany flirted outrageously. The Barone sulked and tore at his mustache. He committed any number of murders, by eye and by wish. When his time came to dance with the mischief-maker, he whirled her around savagely, and never said a word; and once done with,

he sternly returned her to her mother, which he deemed the wisest course to pursue.

"Nora, you are behaving abominably!" whispered her mother, pale with indignation.

"Well, I am having a good time . . . Your dance? Thank you."

And a tender young American led her through the mazes of the waltz, as some poet who knew what he was about phrased it.

It is not an exaggeration to say that there was not a woman in the ballroom to compare with her, and some of them were marvelously gowned and complexioned, too. She overshadowed them not only by sheer beauty, but by exuberance of spirit. And they followed her with hating eyes and whispered scandalous things behind their fans and wondered what had possessed the Marchesa to invite the bold thing: so does mediocrity pay homage to beauty and genius. As for the men, though madness lay that way, eagerly as of old they sought it.

By way of parenthesis: Herr Rosen marched up the hill and down again, something after the manner of a certain warrior king celebrated in verse. The object of his visit had gone to the ball at Cadenabbia. At the hotel he demanded a motor-boat. There was none to be had. In a furious state of mind he engaged two oarsmen to row him across the lake.

And so it came to pass that when Nora, suddenly grown weary of the play, full of bitterness and distaste, hating herself and every one else in the world, stole out to the quay to commune with the moon, she saw him jump from the boat to the landing, scorning the steps. Instantly she drew her lace mantle closely about her face. It was useless. In the man the hunter's instinct was much too keen.

"So I have found you!"

"One would say that I had been in hiding?" coldly.

"From me, always. I have left everything — duty, obligations — to seek you."

"From any other man that might be a compliment."

"I am a prince," he said proudly.

She faced him with that quick resolution, that swift forming of purpose, which has made the Irish so difficult in argument and persuasion. "Will you marry me? Will you make me your wife legally? Before all the world? Will you surrender, for the sake of this love you profess, your right to a great inheritance? Will you risk the anger and the iron hand of your father for my sake?"

"*Herr Gott!* I am mad!" He covered his eyes.

"That expression proves that your Highness is sane again. Have you realized the annoyances, the embarrassments, you have thrust upon me by your pursuit? Have you not read the scandalous innuendoes in the newspapers? Your Highness, I was not born on the Con-

continent, so I look upon my work from a point of view not common to those of your caste. I am proud of it, and I look upon it with honor, honor. I am a woman, but I am not wholly defenseless. There was a time when I thought I might number among my friends a prince; but you have made that impossible."

"Come," he said hoarsely; "let us go and find a priest. You are right. I love you; I will give up everything, everything!"

For a moment she was dumb. This absolute surrender appalled her. But that good fortune which had ever been at her side stepped into the breach. And as she saw the tall form of the Barone approach, she could have thrown her arms around his neck in pure gladness.

"Oh, Barone!" she called. "Am I making you miss this dance?"

"It does not matter, Signorina." The Barone stared keenly at the erect and tense figure at the prima donna's side.

"You will excuse me, Herr Rosen," said Nora, as she laid her hand upon the Barone's arm.

Herr Rosen bowed stiffly; and the two left him standing uncovered in the moonlight.

"What is he doing here? What has he been saying to you?" the Barone demanded. Nora withdrew her hand from his arm. "Pardon me," said he contritely. "I have no right to ask you such questions."

It was not long after midnight when the motor-boat returned to its abiding place. On the way over conversation lagged, and finally died altogether. Mrs. Harrigan fell asleep against Celeste's shoulder, and the musician never deviated her gaze from the silver ripples which flowed out diagonally and magically from the prow of the boat. Nora watched the stars slowly ascend over the eastern range of mountains; and across the fire of his innumerable cigarettes the Barone watched her.

As the boat was made fast to the landing

in front of the Grand Hotel, Celeste observed a man in evening dress, lounging against the rail of the quay. The search-light from the customs-boat, hunting for tobacco smugglers, flashed over his face. She could not repress the little gasp, and her hand tightened upon Nora's arm.

"What is it?" asked Nora.

"Nothing. I thought I was slipping."

CHAPTER IX

COLONEL CAXLEY-WEBSTER

ABBOTT'S studio was under the roof of one of the little hotels that stand timidously and humbly, yet expectantly, between the imposing cream-stucco of the Grand Hotel at one end and the elaborate pink-stucco of the Grande Bretegne at the other. The hob-nailed shoes of the Teuton (who wears his mountain kit all the way from Hamburg to Palermo) wore up and down the stairs all day; and the racket from the hucksters' carts and hotel omnibuses, arriving and departing from the steamboat landing, the shouts of the begging boatmen, the quarreling of the children and the barking of unpedigreed dogs,—these noises were incessant from dawn until sunset.

The artist glared down from his square window at the ruffled waters, or scowled at the fleeting snows on the mountains over the way. He passed some ten or twelve minutes in this useless occupation, but he could not get away from the bald fact that he had acted like a petulant child. To have shown his hand so openly, simply because the Barone had beaten him in the race for the motor-boat! And Nora would understand that he was weak and without backbone. Harrigan himself must have reasoned out the cause for such asinine plays as he had executed in the game of checkers. How many times had the old man called out to him to wake up and move? In spirit he had been across the lake, a spirit in Hades. He was not only a fool, but a coward likewise. He had not dared to

“ . . . put it to the touch
To gain or lose it all.”

He saw it coming: before long he and that Italian would be at each other's throats.

"Come in!" he called, in response to a sudden thunder on the door.

The door opened and a short, energetic old man, purple-visaged and hawk-eyed, came in. "Why the devil don't you join the Trappist monks, Abbott? If I wasn't tough I should have died of apoplexy on the second landing."

"Good morning, Colonel!" Abbott laughed and rolled out the patent rocker for his guest. "What's on your mind this morning? I can give you one without ice."

"I'll take it neat, my boy. I'm not thirsty, I'm faint. These Italian architects; they call three ladders flights of stairs! . . . Ha! That's Irish whisky, and jolly fine. Want you to come over and take tea this afternoon. I'm going up presently to see the Harrigans. Thought I'd go around and do the thing informally. Taken a fancy to the old chap. He's a little bit of all right. I'm no older than he is, but look at the difference! Whisky and soda, that's the racket. Not by the tub-

ful; just an ordinary half dozen a day, and a dem climate thrown in."

"Difference in training."

"Rot! It's the sized hat a man wears. I'd give fifty guineas to see the old fellow in action. But, I say; recall the argument we had before you went to Paris?"

"Yes."

"Well, I win. Saw him bang across the street this morning."

Abbott muttered something.

"What was that?"

"Nothing."

"Sounded like 'dem it' to me."

"Maybe it did."

"Heard about him in Paris?"

"No."

"The old boy had transferred his regiment to a lonesome post in the North to cool his blood. The youngster took the next train to Paris. He was there incognito for two weeks before they found him and bundled him back.

Of course, every one knows that he is but a crazy lad who's had too much freedom." The colonel emptied his glass. "I feel dem sorry for Nora. She's the right sort. But a woman can't take a man by the scruff of his neck and chuck him."

"But I can," declared Abbott savagely.

"Tut, tut! He'd eat you alive. Besides, you will find him too clever to give you an opening. But he'll bear watching. He's capable of putting her on a train and running away with her. Between you and me, I don't blame him. What's the matter with sicking the Barone on him? He's the best man in Southern Italy with foils and broadswords. Sic 'em, Towser; sic 'em!" The old fire-eater chuckled.

The subject was extremely distasteful to the artist. The colonel, a rough soldier, whose diplomacy had never risen above the heights of clubbing a recalcitrant Hill man into submission, baldly inferred that he understood the

artist's interest in the rose of the Harrigan family. He would have liked to talk more in regard to the interloper, but it would have been sheer folly. The colonel, in his blundering way, would have brought up the subject again at tea-time and put everybody on edge. He had, unfortunately for his friends, a reputation other than that of a soldier: he posed as a peacemaker. He saw trouble where none existed, and the way he patched up imaginary quarrels would have strained the patience of Job. Still, every one loved him, though they lived in mortal fear of him. So Abbott came about quickly and sailed against the wind.

"By the way," he said, "I wish you would let me sketch that servant of yours. He's got a profile like a medallion. Where did you pick him up?"

"In the Hills. He's a Sikh, and a first-class fighting man. Didn't know that you went for faces."

"Not as a usual thing. Just want it for my

own use. How does he keep his beard combed that way?"

"I've never bothered myself about the curl of his whiskers. Are my clothes laid out? Luggage attended to? Guns shipshape? That's enough for me. Some day you have got to go out there with me."

"Never shot a gun in all my life. I don't know which end to hold at my shoulder."

"Teach you quick enough. Every man's a born hunter. Rao will have tigers eating out of your hand. He's a marvel; saved my hide more than once. Funny thing; you can't show 'em that you're grateful. Lose caste if you do. I rather miss it. Get the East in your blood and you'll never get it out. Fascinating! But my liver turned over once too many times. Ha! Some one coming up to buy a picture."

The step outside was firm and unwearied by the climb. The door opened unceremoniously, and Courtlandt came in. He stared

at the colonel and the colonel returned the stare.

“Caxley-Webster! Well, I say, this globe goes on shrinking every day!” cried Courtlandt.

The two pumped hands energetically, sizing each other up critically. Then they sat down and shot questions, while Abbott looked on bewildered. Elephants and tigers and chittahs and wild boar and quail-running and strange guttural names; weltering nights in the jungles, freezing mornings in the Hills; stupendous card games; and what had become of so-and-so, who always drank his whisky neat; and what’s-his-name, who invented cures for snake bites!

Abbott deliberately pushed over an oak bench. “Am I host here or not?”

“Abby, old man, how are you?” said Courtlandt, smiling warmly and holding out his hand. “My apologies; but the colonel and I never expected to see each other again.

And I find him talking with you up here under this roof. It's marvelous."

"It's a wonder you wouldn't drop a fellow a line," said Abbott, in a faultfinding tone, as he righted the bench. "When did you come?"

"Last night. Came up from Como."

"Going to stay long?"

"That depends. I am really on my way to Zermatt. I've a hankering to have another try at the Matterhorn."

"Think of that!" exclaimed the colonel. "He says another try."

"You came a roundabout way," was the artist's comment.

"Oh, that's because I left Paris for Brescia. They had some good flights there. Wonderful year! They cross the Channel in an airship and discover the North Pole."

"Pah! Neither will be of any use to humanity; merely a fine sporting proposition."

The colonel dug into his pocket for his pipe.

"But what do you think of Germany?"

"Fine country," answered Courtlandt, rising and going to a window; "fine people, too. Why?"

"Do you — er — think they could whip us?"

"On land, yes."

"The devil!"

"On water, no."

"Thanks. In other words, you believe our chances equal?"

"So equal that all this war-scare is piffle. But I rather like to see you English get up in the air occasionally. It will do you good. You've an idea because you walloped Napoleon that you're the same race you were then, and you are not. The English-speaking races, as the first soldiers, have ceased to be."

"Well, I be dem!" gasped the colonel.

"It's the truth. Take the American: he

thinks there is nothing in the world but money. Take the Britisher: to him caste is everything. Take the money out of one man's mind and the importance of being well-born out of the other" He turned from the window and smiled at the artist and the empurpling Anglo-Indian.

"Abbott," growled the soldier, "that man will some day drive me amuck. What do you think? One night, on a tiger hunt, he got me into an argument like this. A brute of a beast jumped into the middle of it. Courtlandt shot him on the second bound, and turned to me with — 'Well, as I was saying!' I don't know to this day whether it was nerve or what you Americans call gall."

"Divided by two," grinned Abbott.

"Ha, I see; half nerve and half gall. I'll remember that. But we were talking of air-ships."

"I was," retorted Courtlandt. "You were the man who started the powwow." He

looked down into the street with sudden interest. "Who is that?"

The colonel and Abbott hurried across the room.

"What did I say, Abbott? I told you I saw him. He's crazy; fact. Thinks he can travel around incognito when there isn't a magazine on earth that hasn't printed his picture."

"Well, why shouldn't he travel around if he wants to?" asked Courtlandt coolly.

The colonel nudged the artist.

"There happens to be an attraction in Belaggio," said Abbott irritably.

"The moth and the candle," supplemented the colonel, peering over Courtlandt's shoulder. "He's well set up," grudgingly admitted the old fellow.

"The moth and the candle," mused Courtlandt. "That will be Nora Harrigan. How long has this infatuation been going on?"

"Year and a half."

"And the other side?"

"There isn't any other side," exploded the artist. "She's worried to death. Not a day passes but some scurrilous penny-a-liner springs some yarn, some beastly innuendo. She's been dodging the fellow for months. In Paris last year she couldn't move without running into him. This year she changed her apartment, and gave orders at the Opera to refuse her address to all who asked for it. Consequently she had some peace. I don't know why it is, but a woman in public life seems to be a target."

"The penalty of beauty, Abby. Homely women seldom are annoyed, unless they become suffragists." The colonel poured forth a dense cloud of smoke.

"What brand is that, Colonel?" asked Courtlandt, choking.

The colonel generously produced his pouch.

"No, no! I was about to observe that it isn't ambrosia."

"Rotter!" The soldier dug the offender in the ribs. "I am going to have the Harrigans over for tea this afternoon. Come over! You'll like the family. The girl is charming; and the father is a sportsman to the backbone. Some silly fools laugh behind his back, but never before his face. And my word, I know rafts of gentlemen who are not fit to stand in his shoes."

"I should like to meet Mr. Harrigan." Courtlandt returned his gaze to the window once more.

"And his daughter?" said Abbott, curiously.

"Oh, surely!"

"I may count on you, then?" The colonel stowed away the offending brier. "And you can stay to dinner."

"I'll take the dinner end of the invitation," was the reply. "I've got to go over to Menaggio to see about some papers to be signed. If I can make the three o'clock boat

in returning, you'll see me at tea. Dinner at all events. I'm off."

"Do you mean to stand there and tell me that you have important business?" jeered Abbott.

"My boy, the reason I'm on trains and boats, year in and year out, is in the vain endeavor to escape important business. Now and then I am rounded up. Were you ever hunted by money?" humorously.

"No," answered the Englishman sadly. "But I know one thing: I'd throw the race at the starting-post. Millions, Abbott, and to be obliged to run away from them! If the deserts hadn't dried up all my tears, I should weep. Why don't you hire a private secretary to handle your affairs?"

"And have him following at my heels?" Courtlandt gazed at his lean brown hands. "When these begin to shake, I'll do so. Well, I shall see you both at dinner, whatever happens."

"That's Courtlandt," said Abbott, when his friend was gone. "You think he's in Singapore, the door opens and in he walks; never any letter or announcement. He arrives, that's all."

"Strikes me," returned the other, polishing his glass, holding it up to the light, and then screwing it into his eye; "strikes me, he wasn't overanxious to have that dish of tea. Afraid of women?"

"Afraid of women! Why, man, he backed two musical shows in the States a few years ago."

"Musical comedies?" The glass dropped from the colonel's eye. "That's going tigers one better. Forty women, all waiting to be stars, and solemn Courtlandt wandering among them as the god of amity! Afraid of them! Of course he is. Who wouldn't be, after such an experience?" The colonel laughed. "Never had any serious affair?"

"Never heard of one. There was some

tommy-rot about a Mahommedan princess in the newspapers; but I knew there was no truth in that. Queer fellow! He wouldn't take the trouble to deny it."

"Never showed any signs of being a woman-hater?"

"No, not the least in the world. But to shy at meeting Nora Harrigan . . ."

"There you have it; the privilege of the gods. Perhaps he really has business in Menaggio. What'll we do with the other beggar?"

"Knock his head off, if he bothers her."

"Better turn the job over to Courtlandt, then. You're in the light-weight class, and Courtlandt is the best amateur for his weight I ever saw."

"What, boxes?"

"A tough 'un. I had a corporal who beat any one in Northern India. Courtlandt put on the gloves with him and had him begging in the third round."

"I never knew that before. He's as full of surprises as a rummage bag."

Courtlandt walked up the street leisurely, idly pausing now and then before the shop-windows. Apparently he had neither object nor destination; yet his mind was busy, so busy in fact that he looked at the various curios without truly seeing them at all. A delicate situation, which needed the lightest handling, confronted him. He must wait for an overt act, then he might proceed as he pleased. How really helpless he was! He could not force her hand because she held all the cards and he none. Yet he was determined this time to play the game to the end, even if the task was equal to all those of Hercules rolled into one, and none of the gods on his side.

At the hotel he asked for his mail, and was given a formidable packet which, with a sigh of discontent, he slipped into a pocket, strolled out into the garden by the water, and sat down

to read. To his surprise there was a note, without stamp or postmark. He opened it, mildly curious to learn who it was that had discovered his presence in Bellaggio so quickly. The envelope contained nothing more than a neatly folded bank-note for one hundred francs. He eyed it stupidly. What might this mean? He unfolded it and smoothed it out across his knee, and the haze of puzzlement drifted away. Three bars from *La Bohème*. He laughed. So the little lady of the Taverne Royale was in Bellaggio!

CHAPTER X

MARGUERITES AND EMERALDS

FROM where he sat Courtlandt could see down the main thoroughfare of the pretty village. There were other streets, to be sure, but courtesy and good nature alone permitted this misapplication of title: they were merely a series of torturous enervating stairways of stone, up and down which noisy wooden sandals clattered all the day long. Over the entrances to the shops the proprietors were dropping the white and brown awnings for the day. Very few people shopped after luncheon. There were pleasanter pastimes, even for the women, contradictory as this may seem. By eleven o'clock Courtlandt had finished the reading of his mail, and was now ready to hunt for the little lady of the Taverne

Royale. It was necessary to find her. The whereabouts of Flora Desimone was of vital importance. If she had not yet arrived, the presence of her friend presaged her ultimate arrival. The duke was a negligible quantity. It would have surprised Courtlandt could he have foreseen the drawing together of the ends of the circle and the relative concernment of the duke in knotting those ends. The labors of Hercules had never entailed the subjugation of two temperamental women.

He rose and proceeded on his quest. Before the photographer's shop he saw a dachel wrathfully challenging a cat on the balcony of the adjoining building. The cat knew, and so did the puppy, that it was all buncombe on the puppy's part: the usual European war-scare, in which one of the belligerent parties refused to come down because it wouldn't have been worth while, there being the usual Powers ready to intervene. Courtlandt did not bother about the cat; the puppy

claimed his attention. He was very fond of dogs. So he reached down suddenly and put an end to the sharp challenge. The dachsel struggled valiantly, for this breed of dog does not make friends easily.

"I say, you little Dutchman, what's the row? I'm not going to hurt you. Funny little codger! To whom do you belong?" He turned the collar around, read the inscription, and gently put the puppy on the ground.

Nora Harrigan!

His immediate impulse was to walk on, but somehow this impulse refused to act on his sense of locomotion. He waited, dully wondering what was going to happen when she came out. He had left her room that night in Paris, vowing that he would never intrude on her again. With the recollection of that bullet whizzing past his ear, he had been convinced that the play was done. True, she had testified that it had been accidental, but never would he forget the look in her eyes. It was

not pleasant to remember. And still, as the needle is drawn by the magnet, here he was, in Bellaggio. He cursed his weakness. From Brescia he had made up his mind to go directly to Berlin. Before he realized how useless it was to battle against these invisible forces, he was in Milan, booking for Como. At Como he had remained a week (the dullest week he had ever known); at the Villa d'Este three days; at Cadenabbia one day. It had all the characteristics of a tug-of-war, and irresistibly he was drawn over the line. The night before he had taken the evening boat across the lake. And Herr Rosen had been his fellow-passenger! The goddess of chance threw whimsical coils around her victims. To find himself shoulder to shoulder, as it were, with this man who, perhaps more than all other incentives, had urged him to return again to civilization; this man who had aroused in his heart a sentiment that hitherto he had

not believed existed,— jealousy. . . . Ah, voices! He stepped aside quickly.

“ Fritz, Fritz; where are you? ”

And a moment later she came out, followed by her mother . . . and the little lady of the Taverne Royale. Did Nora see him? It was impossible to tell. She simply stooped and gathered up the puppy, who struggled determinedly to lick her face. Courtlandt lifted his hat. It was in nowise offered as an act of recognition; it was merely the mechanical courtesy that a man generally pays to any woman in whose path he chances to be for the breath of a second. The three women in immaculate white, hatless, but with sunshades, passed on down the street.

Courtlandt went into the shop, rather blindly. He stared at the shelves of paper-covered novels and post-cards, and when the polite proprietor offered him a dozen of the latter, he accepted them without comment.

Indeed, he put them into a pocket and turned to go out.

"Pardon, sir; those are one franc the dozen."

"Ah, yes." Courtlandt pulled out some silver. It was going to be terribly difficult, and his heart was heavy with evil presages. He had seen Celeste. He understood the amusing if mysterious comedy now. Nora had recognized him and had sent her friend to follow him and learn where he went. And he, poor fool of a blunderer, with the best intentions in the world, he had gone at once to the Calabrian's apartment! It was damnable of fate. He had righted nothing. In truth, he was deeper than ever in the quicksands of misunderstanding. He shut his teeth with a click. How neatly she had waylaid and trapped him!

"Those are from Lucerne, sir."

"What?" bewildered.

"Those wood-carvings which you are touching with your cane, sir."

"I beg your pardon," said Courtlandt, apologetically, and gained the open. He threw a quick glance down the street. There they were. He proceeded in the opposite direction, toward his hotel. Tea at the colonel's? Scarcely. He would go to Menaggio with the hotel motor-boat and return so late that he would arrive only in time for dinner. He was not going to meet the enemy over tea-cups, at least, not under the soldier's tactless supervision. He must find a smoother way, calculated, under the rose, but seemingly accidental. It was something to ponder over.

"Nora, who was that?" asked Mrs. Harrigan.

"Who was who?" countered Nora, snuggling the wriggling dachel under her arm and throwing the sunshade across her shoulder.

"That fine-looking young man who stood

by the door as we passed out. He raised his hat."

"Oh, bother! I was looking at Fritz."

Celeste searched her face keenly, but Nora looked on ahead serenely; not a quiver of an eyelid, not the slightest change in color or expression.

"She did not see him!" thought the musician, curiously stirred. She knew her friend tolerably well. It would have been impossible for her to have seen that man and not to have given evidence of the fact.

In short, Nora had spoken truthfully. She had seen a man dressed in white flannels and canvas shoes, but her eyes had not traveled so far as his face.

"Mother, we must have some of those silk blankets. They're so comfy to lie on."

"You never see anything except when you want to," complained Mrs. Harrigan.

"It saves a deal of trouble. I don't want to go to the colonel's this afternoon. He al-

ways has some frump to pour tea and ask fool questions."

"The frump, as you call her, is usually a countess or a duchess," with asperity.

"Fiddlesticks! Nobility makes a specialty of frumps; it is one of the species of the caste. That's why I shall never marry a title. I wish neither to visit nor to entertain frumps. Frump,—the word calls up the exact picture; frump and fatuity. Oh, I'll go, but I'd rather stay on my balcony and read a good book."

"My dear," patiently, "the colonel is one of the social laws on Como. His sister is the wife of an earl. You must not offend him. His Sundays are the most exclusive on the lake."

"The word exclusive should be properly applied to those in jail. The social ladder, the social ladder! Don't you know, mother mine, that every rung is sawn by envy and greed, and that those who climb highest fall farthest?"

"You are quoting the padre."

"The padre could give lessons in kindness and shrewdness to any other man I know. If he hadn't chosen the gown he would have been a poet. I love the padre, with his snow-white hair and his withered leathery face. He was with the old king all through the freeing of Italy."

"And had a fine time explaining to the Vatican," sniffed the mother.

"Some day I am going to confess to him."

"Confess what?" asked Celeste.

"That I have wished the Calabrian's voice would fail her some night in *Carmen*; that I am wearing shoes a size too small for me; that I should like to be rich without labor; that I am sometimes ashamed of my calling; that I should have liked to see father win a prize-fight; oh, and a thousand other horrid, hateful things."

"I wish to gracious that you would fall violently in love."

"Spiteful! There are those lovely lace collars; come on."

"You are hopeless," was the mother's conviction.

"In some things, yes," gravely.

"Some day," said Celeste, who was a privileged person in the Harrigan family, "some day I am going to teach you two how to play at foils. It would be splendid. And then you could always settle your differences with bouts."

"Better than that," retorted Nora. "I'll ask father to lend us his old set of gloves. He carries them around as if they were a fetish. I believe they're in the bottom of one of my steamer trunks."

"Nora!" Mrs. Harrigan was not pleased with this jest. Any reference to the past was distasteful to her ears. She, too, went regularly to confession, but up to the present time had omitted the sin of being ashamed of her former poverty and environment. She had

taken it for granted that upon her shoulders rested the future good fortune of the Harrigans. They had money; all that was required was social recognition. She found it a battle within a battle. The good-natured reluctance of her husband and the careless indifference of her daughter were as hard to combat as the icy aloofness of those stars into whose orbit she was pluckily striving to steer the family bark. It never entered her scheming head that the reluctance of the father and the indifference of the daughter were the very conditions that drew society nearward, for the simple novelty of finding two persons who did not care in the least whether they were recognized or not.

The trio invaded the lace shop, and Nora and her mother agreed to bury the war-hatchet in their mutual love of Venetian and Florentine fineries. Celeste pretended to be interested, but in truth she was endeavoring to piece together the few facts she had been

able to extract from the rubbish of conjecture. Courtlandt and Nora had met somewhere before the beginning of her own intimacy with the singer. They certainly must have formed an extraordinary friendship, for Nora's subsequent vindictiveness could not possibly have arisen out of the ruins of an indifferent acquaintance. Nora could not be moved from the belief that Courtlandt had abducted her; but Celeste was now positive that he had had nothing to do with it. He did not impress her as a man who would abduct a woman, hold her prisoner for five days, and then liberate her without coming near her to press his vantage, rightly or wrongly. He was too strong a personage. He was here in Bellaggio, and attached to that could be but one significance.

Why, then, had he not spoken at the photographer's? Perhaps she herself had been sufficient reason for his dumbness. He had recognized her, and the espionage of the night in Paris was no longer a mystery. Nora had

sent her to follow him; why then all this bitterness, since she had not been told where he had gone? Had Nora forgotten to inquire? It was possible that, in view of the startling events which had followed, the matter had slipped entirely from Nora's mind. Many a time she had resorted to that subtle guile known only of woman to trap the singer. But Nora never stumbled, and her smile was as firm a barrier to her thoughts, her secrets, as a stone wall would have been.

Celeste had known about Herr Rosen's infatuation. Aside from that which concerned this stranger, Nora had withheld no real secret from her. Herr Rosen had been given his congé, but that did not prevent him from sending fabulous baskets of flowers and gems, all of which were calmly returned without comment. Whenever a jewel found its way into a bouquet of flowers from an unknown, Nora would promptly convert it into money and give the proceeds to some charity. It afforded the

singer no small amusement to show her scorn in this fashion. Yes, there was one other little mystery which she did not confide to her friends. Once a month, wherever she chanced to be singing, there arrived a simple bouquet of marguerites, in the heart of which they would invariably find an uncut emerald. Nora never disposed of these emeralds. The flowers she would leave in her dressing-room; the emerald would disappear. Was there some one else?

Mrs. Harrigan took the omnibus up to the villa. It was generally too much of a climb for her. Nora and Celeste preferred to walk.

"What am I going to do, Celeste? He is here, and over at Cadenabbia last night I had a terrible scene with him. In heaven's name, why can't they let me be?"

"Herr Rosen?"

"Yes."

"Why not speak to your father?"

"And have a fisticuff which would appear

in every newspaper in the world? No, thank you. There is enough scandalous stuff being printed as it is, and I am helpless to prevent it."

As the climb starts off stiffly, there wasn't much inclination in either to talk. Celeste had come to one decision, and that was that Nora should find out Courtlandt's presence here in Bellaggio herself. When they arrived at the villa gates, Celeste offered a suggestion.

"You could easily stop all this rumor and annoyance."

"And, pray, how?"

"Marry."

"I prefer the rumor and annoyance. I hate men. Most of them are beasts."

"You are prejudiced."

If Celeste expected Nora to reply that she had reason, she was disappointed. Nora quickened her pace, that was all.

At luncheon Harrigan innocently threw a bomb into camp by inquiring: "Say, Nora, who's this chump Herr Rosen? He was up

here last night and again this morning. I was going to offer him the cot on the balcony, but I thought I'd consult you first."

"Herr Rosen!" exclaimed Mrs. Harrigan, a flutter in her throat. "Why, that's . . ."

"A charming young man who wishes me to sign a contract to sing to him in perpetuity," interrupted Nora, pressing her mother's foot warningly.

"Well, why don't you marry him?" laughed Harrigan. "There's worse things than frankfurters and sauerkraut."

"Not that I can think of just now," returned Nora.

CHAPTER XI

AT THE CRATER'S EDGE

HARRIGAN declared that he would not go over to Caxley-Webster's to tea.

"But I've promised for you!" expostulated his wife. "And he admires you so."

"Bosh! You women can gad about as much as you please, but I'm in wrong when it comes to eating sponge-cake and knuckling my knees under a dinky willow table. And then he always has some frump . . ."

"Frump!" repeated Nora, delighted.

"Frump inspecting me through a pair of eye-glasses as if I was a new kind of an animal. It's all right, Molly, when there's a big push. They don't notice me much then. But these six by eight parties have me covering."

"Very well, dad," agreed Nora, who saw

the storm gathering in her mother's eyes. "You can stay home and read the book mother got you yesterday. Where are you now?"

"Page one," grinning.

Mrs. Harrigan wisely refrained from continuing the debate. James had made up his mind not to go. If the colonel repeated his invitation to dinner, where there would be only the men folk, why, he'd gladly enough go to that.

The women departed at three, for there was to be tennis until five o'clock. When Harrigan was reasonably sure that they were half the distance to the colonel's villa, he put on his hat, whistled to the dachel, and together they took the path to the village.

"We'd look fine drinking tea, wouldn't we, old scout?" reaching down and tweaking the dog's velvet ears. "They don't understand, and it's no use trying to make 'em. Nora gets as near as possible. Herr Rosen! Now, where have I seen his phiz before? I wish I

had a real man to talk to. Abbott sulks half the time, and the Barone can't get a joke unless it's driven in with a mallet. On your way, old scout, or I'll step on you. Let's see if we can hoof it down to the village at a trot without taking the count."

He had but two errands to execute. The first was accomplished expeditely in the little tobacconist's shop under the arcade, where the purchase of a box of Minghetti cigars promised later solace. These cigars were cheap, but Harrigan had a novel way of adding to their strength if not to their aroma. He possessed a meerschaum cigar-holder, in which he had smoked perfectos for some years. The smoke of an ordinary cigar became that of a regalia by the time it passed through the nicotine-soaked clay into the amber mouthpiece. He had kept secret the result of this trifling scientific research. It wouldn't have been politic to disclose it to Molly. The second errand took time and deliberation. He stud-

ied the long shelves of Tauchnitz. Having red corpuscles in superabundance, he naturally preferred them in his literature, in the same quantity.

"Ever read this?" asked a pleasant voice from behind, indicating *Rodney Stone* with the ferrule of a cane.

Harrigan looked up. "No. What's it about?"

"Best story of the London prize-ring ever written. You're Mr. Harrigan, aren't you?"

"Yes," diffidently.

"My name is Edward Courtlandt. If I am not mistaken, you were a great friend of my father's."

"Are you Dick Courtlandt's boy?"

"I am."

"Well, say!" Harrigan held out his hand and was gratified to encounter a man's grasp. "So you're Edward Courtlandt? Now, what do you think of that! Why, your father was the best sportsman I ever met. Square as

they make 'em. Not a kink anywhere in his make-up. He used to come to the bouts in his plug hat and dress suit; always had a seat by the ring. I could hear him tap with his cane when there happened to be a bit of pretty sparring. He was no slouch himself when it came to putting on the mitts. Many's the time I've had a round or two with him in my old gymnasium. Well, well! It's good to see a man again. I've seen your name in the papers, but I never knew you was Dick's boy. You've got an old grizzly's head in your dining-room at home. Some day I'll tell you how it got there, when you're not in a hurry. I went out to Montana for a scrap, and your dad went along. After the mill was over, we went hunting. Come up to the villa and meet the folks. . . . Hang it, I forgot. They're up to Caxley-Webster's to tea; piffle water and sticky sponge-cake. I want you to meet my wife and daughter."

"I should be very pleased to meet them."

So this was Nora's father? "Won't you come along with me to the colonel's?" with sudden inspiration. Here was an opportunity not to be thrust aside lightly.

"Why, I just begged off. They won't be expecting me now."

"All the better. I'd rather have you introduce me to your family than to have the colonel. As a matter of fact, I told him I couldn't get up. But I changed my mind. Come along." The first rift in the storm-packed clouds; and to meet her through the kindly offices of this amiable man who was her father!

"But the pup and the cigar box?"

"Send them up."

Harrigan eyed his own spotless flannels and compared them with the other's. What was good enough for the son of a millionaire was certainly good enough for him. Besides, it would be a bully good joke on Nora and Molly.

"You're on!" he cried. Here was a lark.

He turned the dog and the purchases over to the proprietor, who promised that they should arrive instantly at the villa.

Then the two men sought the quay to engage a boat. They walked shoulder to shoulder, flat-backed, with supple swinging limbs, tanned faces and clear animated eyes. Perhaps Harrigan was ten or fifteen pounds heavier, but the difference would have been noticeable only upon the scales.

"Padre, my shoe pinches," said Nora with a pucker between her eyes.

"My child," replied the padre, "never carry your vanity into a shoemaker's shop. The happiest man is he who walks in loose shoes."

"If they are his own, and not inherited," quickly.

The padre laughed quietly. He was very fond of this new-found daughter of his. Her spontaneity, her blooming beauty, her careless

observation of convention, her independence, had captivated him. Sometimes he believed that he thoroughly understood her, when all at once he would find himself mentally peering into some dark corner into which the penetrating light of his usually swift deduction could throw no glimmer. She possessed the sins of the butterfly and the latent possibilities of a Judith. She was the most interesting feminine problem he had in his long years encountered. The mother mildly amused him, for he could discern the character that she was sedulously striving to batten down beneath inane social usages and formalities. Some day she would revert to the original type, and then he would be glad to renew the acquaintance. In rather a shamefaced way (a sensation he could not quite analyze) he loved the father. The pugilist will always embarrass the scholar and excite a negligible envy; for physical perfection is the most envied of all nature's gifts. The padre was short, thick-

set, and inclined toward stoutness in the region of the middle button of his cassock. But he was active enough for all purposes.

"I have had many wicked thoughts lately," resumed Nora, turning her gaze away from the tennis players. She and the padre were sitting on the lower steps of the veranda. The others were loitering by the nets.

"The old plaint disturbs you?"

"Yes."

"Can you not cast it out wholly?"

"Hate has many tentacles."

"What produces that condition of mind?" meditatively. "Is it because we have wronged somebody?"

"Or because somebody has wronged us?"

"Or misjudged us, by us have been misjudged?" softly.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Nora, springing up.

"What is it?"

"Father is coming up the path!"

"I am glad to see him. But I do not recollect having seen the face of the man with him."

The lithe eagerness went out of Nora's body instantly. Everything seemed to grow cold, as if she had become enveloped in one of those fogs that suddenly blow down menacingly from hidden icebergs. Fortunately the inquiring eyes of the padre were not directed at her. He was here, not a dozen yards away, coming toward her, her father's arm in his! After what had passed he had dared! It was not often that Nora Harrigan was subjected to a touch of vertigo, but at this moment she felt that if she stirred ever so little she must fall. The stock whence she had sprung, however, was aggressive and fearless; and by the time Courtlandt had reached the outer markings of the courts, Nora was physically herself again. The advantage of the meeting would be his. That was indubitable. Any mistake on her part

would be playing into his hands. If only she had known!

"Let us go and meet them, Padre," she said quietly. With her father, her mother and the others, the inevitable introduction would be shorn of its danger. What Celeste might think was of no great importance; Celeste had been tried and her loyalty proven. Where had her father met him, and what diabolical stroke of fate had made him bring this man up here?

"Nora!" It was her mother calling.

She put her arm through the padre's, and they went forward leisurely.

"Why, father, I thought you weren't coming," said Nora. Her voice was without a tremor.

The padre hadn't the least idea that a volcano might at any moment open up at his side. He smiled benignly.

"Changed my mind," said Harrigan.
"Nora, Molly, I want you to meet Mr. Court-

landt. I don't know that I ever said anything about it, but his father was one of the best friends I ever had. He was on his way up here, so I came along with him." Then Harrigan paused and looked about him embarrassedly. There were half a dozen unfamiliar faces.

The colonel quickly stepped into the breach, and the introduction of Courtlandt became general. Nora bowed, and became at once engaged in an animated conversation with the Barone, who had just finished his set victoriously.

The padre's benign smile slowly faded.

CHAPTER XII

DICK COURTLANDT'S BOY

PRESENTLY the servants brought out the tea-service. The silent dark-skinned Sikh, with his fierce curling whiskers, his flashing eyes, the semi-military, semi-oriental garb, topped by an enormous brown turban, claimed Courtlandt's attention; and it may be added that he was glad to have something to look at unembarrassedly. He wanted to catch the Indian's eye, but Rao had no glances to waste; he was concerned with the immediate business of superintending the service.

Courtlandt had never been a man to surrender to impulse. It had been his habit to form a purpose and then to go about the fulfilling of it. During the last four or five months, however, he had swung about like a

weather-cock in April, the victim of a thousand and one impulses. That morning he would have laughed had any one prophesied his presence here. He had fought against the inclination strongly enough at first, but as hour after hour went by his resolution weakened. His meeting Harrigan had been a stroke of luck. Still, he would have come anyhow.

"Oh, yes; I am very fond of Como," he found himself replying mechanically to Mrs. Harrigan. He gave up Rao as hopeless so far as coming to his rescue was concerned. He began, despite his repugnance, to watch Nora.

"It is always a little cold in the higher Alps."

"I am very fond of climbing myself." Nora was laughing and jesting with one of the English tennis players. Not for nothing had she been called a great actress, he thought. It was not humanly possible that her heart was

under better control than his own; and yet his was pounding against his ribs in a manner extremely disquieting. Never must he be left alone with her; always must it be under circumstances like this, with people about, and the more closely about the better. A game like this was far more exciting than tiger-hunting. It was going to assume the characteristics of a duel in which he, being the more advantageously placed, would succeed eventually in wearing down her guard. Hereafter, wherever she went, there must he also go: St. Petersburg or New York or London. And by and by the reporters would hear of it, and there would be rumors which he would neither deny nor affirm. Sport! He smiled, and the blood seemed to recede from his throat and his heart-beats to grow normal.

And all the while Mrs. Harrigan was talking and he was replying; and she thought him charming, whereas he had not formed any

opinion of her at all, nor later could remember a word of the conversation.

"Tea!" bawled the colonel. The verb had its distinct uses, and one generally applied it to the colonel's outbursts without being depressed by the feeling of inelegance.

There is invariably some slight hesitation in the selection of chairs around a tea-table in the open. Nora scored the first point of this singular battle by seizing the padre on one side and her father on the other and pulling them down on the bench. It was adroit in two ways: it put Courtlandt at a safe distance and in nowise offended the younger men, who could find no cause for alarm in the close proximity of her two fathers, the spiritual and the physical. A few moments later Courtlandt saw a smile of malice part her lips, for he found himself between Celeste and the inevitable frump.

"Touched!" he murmured, for he was a

thorough sportsman and appreciated a good point even when taken by his opponent.

"I never saw anything like it," whispered Mrs. Harrigan into the colonel's ear.

"Saw what?" he asked.

"Mr. Courtlandt can't keep his eyes off of Nora."

"I say!" The colonel adjusted his eyeglass, not that he expected to see more clearly by doing so, but because habit had long since turned an affectation into a movement wholly mechanical. "Well, who can blame him? Gad! if I were only twenty-five or thereabouts."

Mrs. Harrigan did not encourage this regret. The colonel had never been a rich man. On the other hand, this Edward Courtlandt was very rich; he was young; and he had the entrée to the best families in Europe, which was greater in her eyes than either youth or riches. Between sips of tea she builded a fine castle in Spain.

Abbott and the Barone carried their cups and cakes over to the bench and sat down on the grass, Turkish-wise. Both simultaneously offered their cakes, and Nora took a lady-finger from each. Abbott laughed and the Barone smiled.

"Oh, daddy mine!" sighed Nora drolly.

"Huh?"

"Don't let mother see those shoes."

"What's the matter with 'em? Everybody's wearing the same."

"Yes. But I don't see how you manage to do it. One shoe-string is virgin white and the other is pagan brown."

"I've got nine pairs of shoes, and yet there's always something the matter," ruefully. "I never noticed when I put them on. Besides, I wasn't coming."

"That's no defense. But rest easy. I'll be as secret as the grave."

"Now, I for one would never have noticed if you hadn't called my attention," said the

padre, stealing a glance at his own immaculate patent-leathers.

"Ah, Padre, that wife of mine has eyes like a pilot-fish. I'm in for it."

"Borrow one from the colonel before you go home," suggested Abbott.

"That's not half bad," gratefully.

Harrigan began to recount the trials of forgetfulness.

Slyly from the corner of her eye Nora looked at Courtlandt, who was at that moment staring thoughtfully into his tea-cup and stirring the contents industriously. His face was a little thinner, but aside from that he had changed scarcely at all; and then, because these two years had left so little mark upon his face, a tinge of unreasonable anger ran over her. "Men have died and worms have eaten them," she thought cynically. Perhaps the air between them was sufficiently charged with electricity to convey the impression across the intervening space; for his eyes came up

quickly, but not quickly enough to catch her. She dropped her glance to Abbott, transferred it to the Barone, and finally let it rest on her father's face. Four handsomer men she had never seen.

"You never told me you knew Courtlandt," said Harrigan, speaking to Abbott.

"Just happened that way. We went to school together. When I was little they used to make me wear curls and wide collars. Many's the time Courtlandt walloped the school bullies for mussing me up. I don't see him much these days. Once in a while he walks in. That's all. Always seems to know where his friends are, but none ever knows where he is."

Abbott proceeded to elaborate some of his friend's exploits. Nora heard, as if from afar. Vaguely she caught a glimmer of what the contest was going to be. She could see only a little way; still, she was optimistically confident of the result. She was ready. In-

deed, now that the shock of the meeting was past, she found herself not at all averse to a conflict. It would be something to let go the pent-up wrath of two years. Never would she speak to him directly; never would she permit him to be alone with her; never would she miss a chance to twist his heart, to humiliate him, to snub him. From her point of view, whatever game he chose to play would be a losing one. She was genuinely surprised to learn how eager she was for the game to begin so that she might gage his strength.

"So I have heard," she was dimly conscious of saying.

"Didn't know you knew," said Abbott.

"Knew what?" rousing herself.

"That Courtlandt nearly lost his life in the eighties."

"In the eighties!" dismayed at her slip.

"Latitudes. Polar expedition."

"Heavens! I was miles away."

The padre took her hand in his own and

began to pat it softly. It was the nearest he dared approach in the way of suggesting caution. He alone of them all knew.

"Oh, I believe I read something about it in the newspapers."

"Five years ago." Abbott set down his tea-cup. "He's the bravest man I know. He's rather a friendless man, besides. Horror of money. Thinks every one is after him for that. Tries to throw it away; but the income piles up too quickly. See that Indian, passing the cakes? Wouldn't think it, would you, that Courtlandt carried him on his back for five miles! The Indian had fallen afoul a wounded tiger, and the beaters were miles off. I've been watching. They haven't even spoken to each other. Courtlandt's probably forgotten all about the incident, and the Indian would die rather than embarrass his savior before strangers."

"Your friend, then, is quite a hero?"

What was the matter with Nora's voice?

Abbott looked at her wonderingly. The tone was hard and unmusical.

"He couldn't be anything else, being Dick Courtlandt's boy," volunteered Harrigan, with enthusiasm. "It runs in the family."

"It seems strange," observed Nora, "that I never heard you mention that you knew a Mr. Courtlandt."

"Why, Nora, there's a lot of things nobody mentions unless chance brings them up. Courtlandt — the one I knew — has been dead these sixteen years. If I knew he had had a son, I'd forgotten all about it. The only graveyard isn't on the hillside; there's one under everybody's thatch."

The padre nodded approvingly.

Nora was not particularly pleased with this phase in the play. Courtlandt would find a valiant champion in her father, who would blunder in when some fine passes were being exchanged. And she could not tell him; she would have cut out her tongue rather. It

was true that she held the principal cards in the game, but she could not table them and claim the tricks as in bridge. She must patiently wait for him to lead, and he, as she very well knew, would lead a card at a time, and then only after mature deliberation. From the exhilaration which attended the prospect of battle she passed into a state of depression, which lasted the rest of the afternoon.

"Will you forgive me?" asked Celeste of Courtlandt. Never had she felt more ill at ease. For a full ten minutes he chatted pleasantly, with never the slightest hint regarding the episode in Paris. She could stand it no longer. "Will you forgive me?"

"For what?"

"That night in Paris."

"Do not permit that to bother you in the least. I was never going to recall it."

"Was it so unpleasant?"

"On the contrary, I was much amused."

"I did not tell you the truth."

"So I have found out."

"I do not believe that it was you," impulsively.

"Thanks. I had nothing to do with Miss Harrigan's imprisonment."

"Do you feel that you could make a confidant of me?"

He smiled. "My dear Miss Fournier, I have come to the place where I distrust even myself."

"Forgive my curiosity!"

Courtlandt held out his cup to Rao. "I am glad to see you again."

"Ah, Sahib!"

The little Frenchwoman was torn with curiosity and repression. She wanted to know what causes had produced this unusual drama which was unfolding before her eyes. To be presented with effects which had no apparent causes was maddening. It was not dissimilar to being taken to the second act of a modern

problem play and being forced to leave before the curtain rose upon the third act. She had laid all the traps her intelligent mind could invent; and Nora had calmly walked over them or around. Nora's mind was Celtic: French in its adroitness and Irish in its watchfulness and tenacity. And now she had set her arts of persuasion in motion (aided by a piquant beauty) to lift a corner of the veil from this man's heart. Checkmate!

"I should like to help you," she said, truthfully.

"In what way?"

It was useless, but she continued: "She does not know that you went to Flora Desimone's that night."

"And yet she sent you to watch me."

"But so many things happened afterward that she evidently forgot."

"That is possible."

"I was asleep when the pistol went off. Oh, you must believe that it was purely ac-

cidental! She was in a terrible state until morning. What if she had killed you, what if she had killed you! She seemed to hark upon that phrase."

Courtlandt turned a sober face toward her. She might be sincere, and then again she might be playing the first game over again, in a different guise. "It would have been embarrassing if the bullet had found its mark." He met her eyes squarely, and she saw that his were totally free from surprise or agitation or interest.

"Do you play chess?" she asked, divertingly.

"Chess? I am very fond of that game."

"So I should judge," dryly. "I suppose you look upon me as a meddler. Perhaps I am; but I have nothing but good will toward you; and Nora would be very angry if she knew that I was discussing her affairs with you. But I love her and want to make her happy."

"That seems to be the ambition of all the young men, at any rate."

Jealousy? But the smile baffled her.
"Will you be here long?"

"It depends."

"Upon Nora?" persistently.

"The weather."

"You are hopeless."

"No; on the contrary, I am the most optimistic man in the world."

She looked into this reply very carefully. If he had hopes of winning Nora Harrigan, optimistic he certainly must be. Perhaps it was not optimism. Rather might it not be a purpose made of steel, bendable but not breakable, reinforced by a knowledge of conditions which she would have given worlds to learn?

"Is she not beautiful?"

"I am not a poet."

"Wait a moment," her eyes widening. "I believe you know who did commit that outrage."

For the first time he frowned.

"Very well; I promise not to ask any more questions."

"That would be very agreeable to me." Then, as if he realized the rudeness of his reply, he added: "Before I leave I will tell you all you wish to know, upon one condition."

"Tell it!"

"You will say nothing to any one, you will question neither Miss Harrigan nor myself, nor permit yourself to be questioned."

"I agree."

"And now, will you not take me over to your friends?"

"Over there?" aghast.

"Why, yes. We can sit upon the grass. They seem to be having a good time."

What a man! Take him over, into the enemy's camp? Nothing would be more agreeable to her. Who would be the stronger, Nora or this provoking man?

So they crossed over and joined the group.

The padre smiled. It was a situation such as he loved to study: a strong man and a strong woman, at war. But nothing happened; not a ripple anywhere to disclose the agitation beneath. The man laughed and the woman laughed, but they spoke not to each other, nor looked once into each other's eyes.

The sun was dropping toward the western tops. The guests were leaving by twos and threes. The colonel had prevailed upon his dinner-guests not to bother about going back to the village to dress, but to dine in the clothes they wore. Finally, none remained but Harrigan, Abbott, the Barone, the padre and Courtlandt. And they talked noisily and agreeably concerning man-affairs until Rao gravely announced that dinner was served.

It was only then, during the lull which followed, that light was shed upon the puzzle which had been subconsciously stirring Harrigan's mind: Nora had not once spoken to the son of his old friend.

CHAPTER XIII

EVERYTHING BUT THE TRUTH

“**I** DON'T see why the colonel didn't invite some of the ladies,” Mrs. Harrigan complained.

“It's a man-party. He's giving it to please himself. And I do not blame him. The women about here treat him abominably. They come at all times of the day and night, use his card-room, order his servants about, drink his whisky and smoke his cigarettes, and generally invite themselves to luncheon and tea and dinner. And then, when they are ready to go back to their villas or hotel, take his motor-boat without a thank-you. The colonel has about three thousand pounds outside his half-pay, and they are all crazy to marry him because his sister is a countess. As a bachelor

he can live like a prince, but as a married man he would have to dig. He told me that if he had been born Adam, he'd have climbed over Eden's walls long before the Angel of the Flaming Sword paddled him out. Says he's always going to be a bachelor, unless I take pity on him," mischievously.

"Has he . . .?" in horrified tones.

"About three times a visit," Nora admitted; "but I told him that I'd be a daughter, a cousin, or a niece to him, or even a grandchild. The latter presented too many complications, so we compromised on niece."

"I wish I knew when you were serious and when you were fooling."

"I am often as serious when I am fooling as I am foolish when I am serious . . ."

"Nora, you will have me shrieking in a minute!" despaired the mother. "Did the colonel really propose to you?"

"Only in fun."

Celeste laughed and threw her arm around

the mother's waist, less ample than substantial. "Don't you care! Nora is being pursued by little devils and is venting her spite on us."

"There'll be too much Burgundy and tobacco, to say nothing of the awful stories."

"With the good old padre there? Hardly," said Nora.

Celeste was a French woman. "I confess that I like a good story that isn't vulgar. And none of them look like men who would stoop to vulgarity."

"That's about all you know of men," declared Mrs. Harrigan.

"I am willing to give them the benefit of a doubt."

"Celeste," cried Nora, gaily, "I've an idea. Supposing you and I run back after dinner and hide in the card-room, which is right across from the dining-room? Then we can judge for ourselves."

"Nora Harrigan!"

"Molly Harrigan!" mimicked the incor-

rigible. "Mother mine, you must learn to recognize a jest."

"Ah, but yours!"

"Fine!" cried Celeste.

As if to put a final period to the discussion, Nora began to hum audibly an aria from *Aida*.

They engaged a carriage in the village and were driven up to the villa. On the way Mrs. Harrigan discussed the stranger, Edward Courtlandt. What a fine-looking young man he was, and how adventurous, how well-connected, how enormously rich, and what an excellent catch! She and Celeste — the one innocently and the other provocatively — continued the subject to the very doors of the villa. All the while Nora hummed softly.

"What do you think of him, Nora?" the mother inquired.

"Think of whom?"

"This Mr. Courtlandt."

"Oh, I didn't pay much attention to him,"

carelessly. But once alone with Celeste, she seized her by the arm, a little roughly. "Celeste, I love you better than any outsider I know. But if you ever discuss that man in my presence again, I shall cease to regard you even as an acquaintance. He has come here for the purpose of annoying me, though he promised the prefect in Paris never to annoy me again."

"The prefect!"

"Yes. The morning I left Versailles I met him in the private office of the prefect. He had powerful friends who aided him in establishing an alibi. I was only a woman, so I didn't count."

"Nora, if I have meddled in any way," proudly, "it has been because I love you, and I see you unhappy. You have nearly killed me with your sphinx-like actions. You have never asked me the result of my spying for you that night. Spying is not one of my usual vocations, but I did it gladly for you."

"You gave him my address?" coldly.

"I did not. I convinced him that I had come at the behest of Flora Desimone. He demanded her address, which I gave him. If ever there was a man in a fine rage, it was he as he left me to go there. If he found out where we lived, the Calabrian assisted him. I spoke to him rather plainly at tea. He said that he had had nothing whatever to do with the abduction, and I believe him. I am positive that he is not the kind of man to go that far and not proceed to the end. And now, will you please tell Carlos to bring my dinner to my room?"

The impulsive Irish heart was not to be resisted. Nora wanted to remain firm, but instead she swept Celeste into her arms. "Celeste, don't be angry! I am very, very unhappy."

If the Irish heart was impulsive, the French one was no less so. Celeste wanted to cry out that she was unhappy, too.

"Don't bother to dress! Just give your hair a pat or two. We'll all three dine on the balcony."

Celeste flew to her room. Nora went over to the casement window and stared at the darkening mountains. When she turned toward the dresser she was astonished to find two bouquets. One was an enormous bunch of violets. The other was of simple marguerites. She picked up the violets. There was a card without a name; but the phrase scribbled across the face of it was sufficient. She flung the violets far down into the grapevines below. The action was without anger, excited rather by a contemptuous indifference. As for the simple marguerites, she took them up gingerly. The arc these described through the air was even greater than that performed by the violets.

"I'm a silly fool, I suppose," she murmured, turning back into the room again.

It was ten o'clock when the colonel bade his guests good night as they tumbled out of his motor-boat. They were in more or less exuberant spirits; for the colonel knew how to do two things particularly well: order a dinner, and avoid the many traps set for him by scheming mamas and eligible widows. Abbott, the Barone and Harrigan, arm in arm, marched on ahead, whistling one tune in three different keys, while Courtlandt set the pace for the padre.

All through the dinner the padre had watched and listened. Faces were generally books to him, and he read in this young man's face many things that pleased him. This was no night rover, a fool over wine and women, a spendthrift. He straightened out the lines and angles in a man's face as a skilled mathematician elucidates an intricate geometrical problem. He had arrived at the basic knowledge that men who live mostly out of doors are not volatile and irresponsible, but

are more inclined to reserve, to reticence, to a philosophy which is broad and comprehensive and generous. They are generally men who are accomplishing things, and who let other people tell about it. Thus, the padre liked Courtlandt's voice, his engaging smile, his frank unwavering eyes; and he liked the leanness about the jaws, which was indicative of strength of character. In fact, he experienced a singular jubilation as he walked beside this silent man.

"There has been a grave mistake somewhere," he mused aloud, thoughtfully.

"I beg your pardon," said Courtlandt.

"I beg yours. I was thinking aloud. How long have you known the Harrigans?"

"The father and mother I never saw before to-day."

"Then you have met Miss Harrigan?"

"I have seen her on the stage."

"I have the happiness of being her confessor."

They proceeded quite as far as a hundred yards before Courtlandt volunteered: "That must be interesting."

"She is a good Catholic."

"Ah, yes; I recollect now."

"And you?"

"Oh, I haven't any religion such as requires my presence in churches. Don't misunderstand me! As a boy I was bred in the Episcopal Church; but I have traveled so much that I have drifted out of the circle. I find that when I am out in the open, in the heart of some great waste, such as a desert, a sea, the top of a mountain, I can see the greatness of the Omnipotent far more clearly and humbly than within the walls of a cathedral."

"But God imposes obligations upon mankind. We have ceased to look upon the hermit as a holy man, but rather as one devoid of courage. It is not the stone and the stained windows; it is the text of our daily work, that

the physical being of the Church represents."

"I have not avoided any of my obligations." Courtlandt shifted his stick behind his back. "I was speaking of the church and the open field, as they impressed me."

"You believe in the tenets of Christianity?"

"Surely! A man must pin his faith and hope to something more stable than humanity."

"I should like to convert you to my way of thinking," simply.

"Nothing is impossible. Who knows?"

The padre, as they continued onward, offered many openings, but the young man at his side refused to be drawn into any confidence. So the padre gave up, for the futility of his efforts became irksome. His own lips were sealed, so he could not ask point-blank the question that clamored at the tip of his tongue.

"So you are Miss Harrigan's confessor?"

"Does it strike you strangely?"

"Merely the coincidence."

"If I were not her confessor I should take the liberty of asking you some questions."

"It is quite possible that I should decline to answer them."

The padre shrugged. "It is patent to me that you will go about this affair in your own way. I wish you well."

"Thank you. As Miss Harrigan's confessor you doubtless know everything but the truth."

The padre laughed this time. The shops were closed. The open restaurants by the water-front held but few idlers. The padre admired the young man's independence. Most men would have hesitated not a second to pour the tale into his ears in hope of material assistance. The padre's admiration was equally proportioned with respect.

"I leave you here," he said. "You will see me frequently at the villa."

"I certainly shall be there frequently. Good night."

Courtlandt quickened his pace which soon brought him alongside the others. They stopped in front of Abbott's pension, and he tried to persuade them to come up for a nightcap.

"Nothing to it, my boy," said Harrigan. "I need no nightcap on top of cognac forty-eight years old. For me that's a whole suit of pajamas."

"You come, Ted."

"Abbey, I wouldn't climb those stairs for a bottle of Horace's Falernian, served on Seneca's famous citron table."

"Not a friend in the world," Abbott lamented.

Laughingly they hustled him into the hallway and fled. Then Courtlandt went his way alone. He slept with the dubious satisfaction that the first day had not gone badly. The wedge had been entered. It remained to be seen if it could be dislodged.

Harrigan was in a happy temper. He

kissed his wife and chucked Nora under the chin. And then Mrs. Harrigan launched the thunderbolt which, having been held on the leash for several hours, had, for all of that, lost none of its ability to blight and scorch.

"James, you are about as hopeless a man as ever was born. You all but disgraced us this afternoon."

"Mother!"

"Me?" cried the bewildered Harrigan.

"Look at those tennis shoes; one white string and one brown one. It's enough to drive a woman mad. What in heaven's name made you come?"

Perhaps it was the after effect of a good dinner, that dwindling away of pleasant emotions; perhaps it was the very triviality of the offense for which he was thus suddenly arraigned; at any rate, he lost his temper, and he was rather formidable when that occurred.

"Damn it, Molly, I wasn't going, but Court-

landt asked me to go with him, and I never thought of my shoes. You are always finding fault with me these days. I don't drink, I don't gamble, I don't run around after other women; I never did. But since you've got this social bug in your bonnet, you keep me on hooks all the while. Nobody noticed the shoe-strings; and they would have looked upon it as a joke if they had. After all, I'm the boss of this ranch. If I want to wear a white string and a black one, I'll do it. Here!" He caught up the book on social usages and threw it out of the window. "Don't ever shove a thing like that under my nose again. If you do, I'll hike back to little old New York and start the gym again."

He rammed one of the colonel's perfectos (which he had been saving for the morrow) between his teeth, and stalked into the garden.

Nora was heartless enough to laugh.

"He hasn't talked like that to me in years!"

Mrs. Harrigan did not know what to do,— follow him or weep. She took the middle course, and went to bed.

Nora turned out the lights and sat out on the little balcony. The moonshine was glorious. So dense was the earth-blackness that the few lights twinkling here and there were more like fallen stars. Presently she heard a sound. It was her father, returning as silently as he could. She heard him fumble among the knickknacks on the mantel, and then go away again. By and by she saw a spot of white light move hither and thither among the grape arbors. For five or six minutes she watched it dance. Suddenly all became dark again. She laid her head upon the railing and conned over the day's events. These were not at all satisfactory to her. Then her thoughts traveled many miles away. Six months of happiness, of romance, of play, and then misery and blackness.

“Nora, are you there?”

"Yes. Over here on the balcony. What were you doing down there?"

"Oh, Nora, I'm sorry I lost my temper. But Molly's begun to nag me lately, and I can't stand it. I went after that book. Did you throw some flowers out of the window?"

"Yes."

"A bunch of daisies?"

"Marguerites," she corrected.

"All the same to me. I picked up the bunch, and look at what I found inside."

He extended his palm, flooding it with the light of his pocket-lamp. Nora's heart tightened. What she saw was a beautiful uncut emerald.

CHAPTER XIV

A COMEDY WITH MUSIC

THE Harrigans occupied the suite in the east wing of the villa. This consisted of a large drawing-room and two ample bed-chambers, with window-balconies and a private veranda in the rear, looking off toward the green of the pines and the metal-like luster of the copper beeches. Always the suite was referred to by the management as having once been tenanted by the empress of Germany. Indeed, tourists were generally and respectfully and impressively shown the suite (provided it was not at the moment inhabited), and were permitted to peer eagerly about for some sign of the vanished august presence. But royalty in passing, as with the most humble of us, leaves nothing behind save the memory of a tip, generous or otherwise.

It was raining, a fine, soft, blurring Alpine rain, and a blue-grey monotone prevailed upon the face of the waters and defied all save the keenest scrutiny to discern where the mountain tops ended and the sky began. It was a day for indoors, for dreams, good books, and good fellows.

The old-fashioned photographer would have admired and striven to perpetuate the group in the drawing-room. In the old days it was quite the proper thing to snap the family group while they were engaged in some pleasant pastime, such as spinning, or painting china, or playing the piano, or reading a volume of poems. No one ever seemed to bother about the incongruence of the eyes, which were invariably focused at the camera lens. Here they all were. Mrs. Harrigan was deep in the intricate maze of the Amelia Ars of Bologna, which, as the initiated know, is a wonderful lace. By one of the windows sat Nora, winding interminable yards of lace-

hemming from off the willing if aching digits of the Barone, who was speculating as to what his Neapolitan club friends would say could they see, by some trick of crystal-gazing, his present occupation. Celeste was at the piano, playing (*pianissimo*) snatches from the operas, while Abbott looked on, his elbows propped upon his knees, his chin in his palms, and a quality of ecstatic content in his eyes. He was in his working clothes, picturesque if paint-daubed. The morning had been pleasant enough, but just before luncheon the rain clouds had gathered and settled down with that suddenness known only in high altitudes.

The ex-gladiator sat on one of those slender mockeries, composed of gold-leaf and parabolic curves and faded brocade, such as one sees at the Trianon or upon the stage or in the new home of a new millionaire, and which, if the true facts be known, the ingenious Louis invented for the discomfort of his favorites

and the folly of future collectors. It creaked whenever Harrigan sighed, which was often, for he was deeply immersed (and no better word could be selected to fit his mental condition) in the baneful book which he had hurled out of the window the night before, only to retrieve like the good dog that he was. To-day his shoes offered no loophole to criticism; he had very well attended to that. His tie harmonized with his shirt and stockings; his suit was of grey tweed; in fact, he was the glass of fashion and the mold of form, at least for the present.

"Say, Molly, I don't see what difference it makes."

"Difference what makes, James?" Mrs. Harrigan raised her eyes from her work. James had been so well-behaved that morning it was only logical for her to anticipate that he was about to abolish at one fell stroke all his hard-earned merits.

"About eating salads. We never used to

put oil on our tomatoes. Sugar and vinegar were good enough."

"Sugar and vinegar are not nourishing; olive-oil is."

"We seemed to hike along all right before we learned that." His guardian angel was alert this time, and he returned to his delving without further comment. By and by he got up. "Pshaw!" He dropped the wearisome volume on the reading-table, took up a paper-covered novel, and turned to the last fight of the blacksmith in *Rodney Stone*. Here was something that made the invention of type excusable, even commendable.

"Play the fourth *ballade*," urged Abbott.

Celeste was really a great artist. As an interpreter of Chopin she had no rival among women, and only one man was her equal. She had fire, tenderness, passion, strength; she had beyond all these, soul, which is worth more in true expression than the most marvelous technique. She had chosen Chopin for his

brilliance, as some will chose Turner in preference to Corot: riots of color, barbaric and tingling. She was as great a genius in her way as Nora was in hers. There was something of the elfin child in her spirit. Whenever she played to Abbott, there was a quality in the expression that awakened a wonderment in Nora's heart.

As Celeste began the *andante*, Nora signified to the Barone to drop his work. She let her own hands fall. Harrigan gently closed his book, for in that rough kindly soul of his lay a mighty love of music. He himself was without expression of any sort, and somehow music seemed to stir the dim and not quite understandable longing for utterance. Mrs. Harrigan alone went on with her work; she could work and listen at the same time. After the magnificent finale, nothing in the room stirred but her needle.

"Bravo!" cried the Barone, breaking the spell.

"You never played that better," declared Nora.

Celeste, to escape the keen inquiry of her friend and to cover up her embarrassment, dashed into one of the lighter compositions, a waltz. It was a favorite of Nora's. She rose and went over to the piano and rested a hand upon Celeste's shoulder. And presently her voice took up the melody. Mrs. Harrigan dropped her needle. It was not that she was particularly fond of music, but there was something in Nora's singing that cast a temporary spell of enchantment over her, rendering her speechless and motionless. She was not of an analytical turn of mind; thus, the truth escaped her. She was really lost in admiration of herself: she had produced this marvelous being!

"That's some!" Harrigan beat his hands together thunderously. "Great stuff; eh, Barone?"

The Barone raised his hands as if to express

his utter inability to describe his sensations. His elation was that ascribed to those fortunate mortals whom the gods lifted to Olympus. At his feet lay the lace-hemming, hopelessly snarled.

"Father, father!" remonstrated Nora; "you will wake up all the old ladies who are having their siesta."

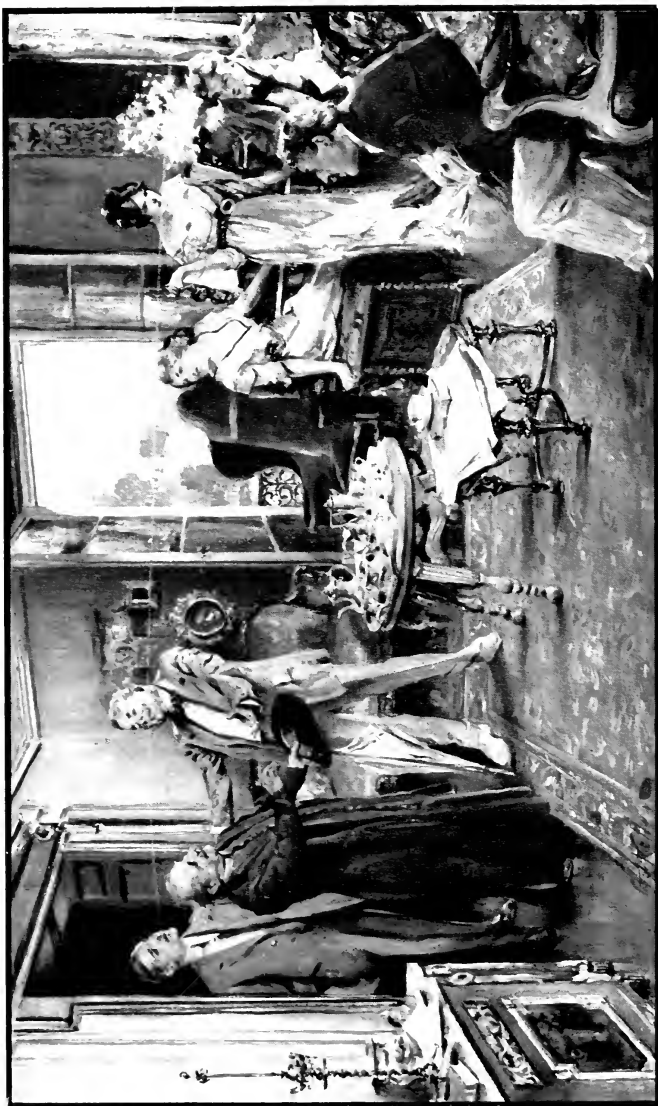
"Bah! I'll bet a doughnut their ears are glued to their doors. What ho! Somebody's at the portcullis. Probably the padre, come up for tea."

He was at the door instantly. He flung it open heartily. It was characteristic of the man to open everything widely, his heart, his mind, his hate or his affection.

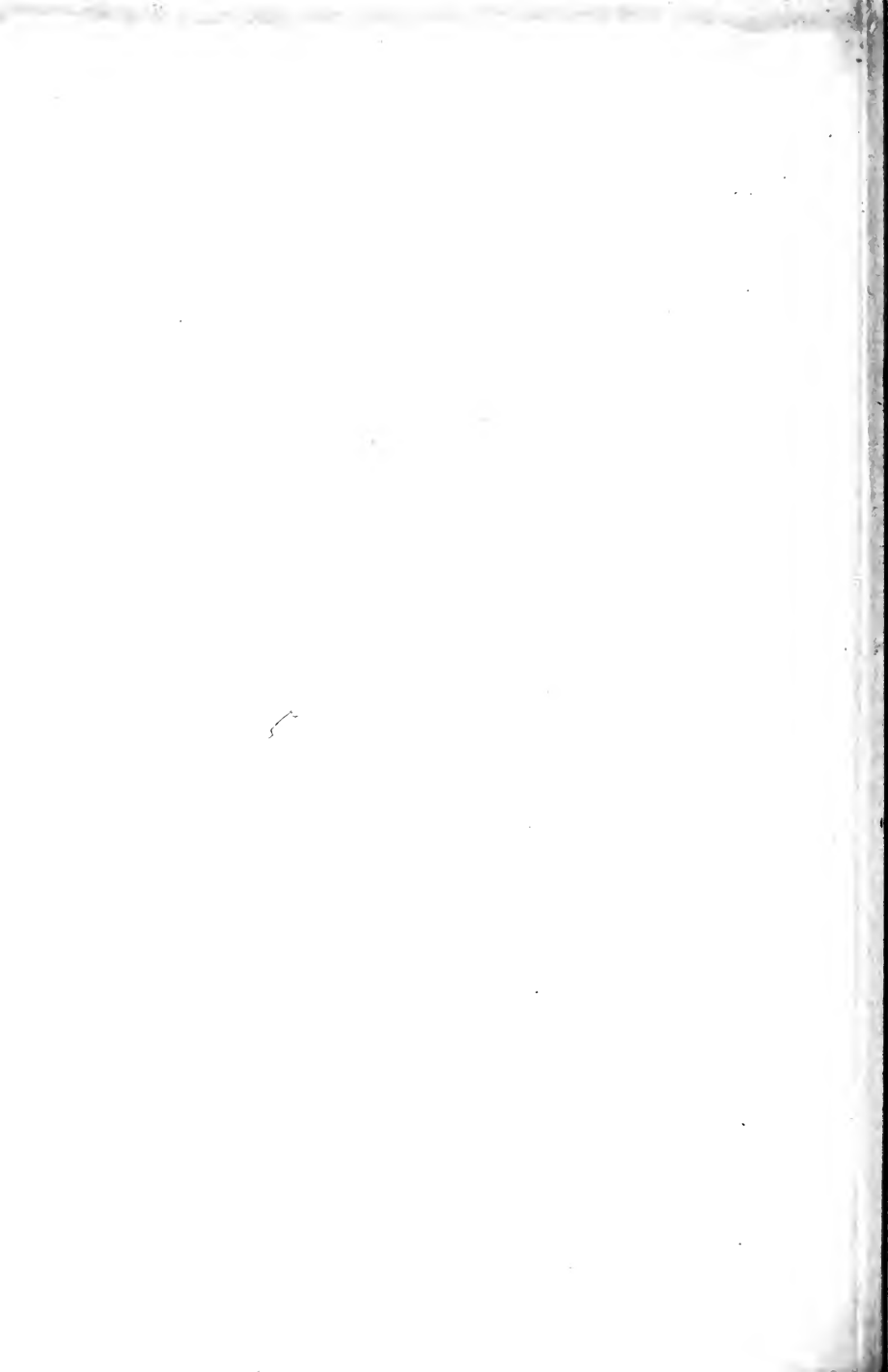
"Come in, come in! Just in time for the matinée concert."

The padre was not alone. Courtlandt followed him in.

"We have been standing in the corridor for ten minutes," affirmed the padre, sending a



Courtland followed him in.



winning smile around the room. "Mr. Courtlandt was for going down to the bureau and sending up our cards. But I would not hear of such formality. I am a privileged person."

"Sure yes! Molly, ring for tea, and tell 'em to make it hot. How about a little peg, as the colonel says?"

The two men declined.

How easily and nonchalantly the man stood there by the door as Harrigan took his hat! Celeste was aquiver with excitement. She was thoroughly a woman: she wanted something to happen, dramatically, romantically.

But her want was a vain one. The man smiled quizzically at Nora, who acknowledged the salutation by a curtsy which would have frightened away the banshees of her childhood. Nora hated scenes, and Courtlandt had the advantage of her in his knowledge of this. Celeste remained at the piano, but Nora turned as if to move away.

"No, no!" cried the padre, his palms ex-

tended in protest. "If you stop the music I shall leave instantly."

"But we are all through, Padre," replied Nora, pinching Celeste's arm, which action the latter readily understood as a command to leave the piano.

Celeste, however, had a perverse streak in her to-day. Instead of rising as Nora expected she would, she wheeled on the stool and began *Morning Mood* from Peer Gynt, because the padre preferred Grieg or Beethoven to Chopin. Nora frowned at the pretty head below her. She stooped.

"I sha'n't forgive you for this trick," she whispered.

Celeste shrugged, and her fingers did not falter. So Nora moved away this time in earnest.

"No, you must sing. That is what I came up for," insisted the padre. If there was any malice in the churchman, it was of a negative quality. But it was in his Latin blood that

drama should appeal to him strongly, and here was an unusual phase in *The Great Play*. He had urged Courtlandt, much against the latter's will this day, to come up with him, simply that he might set a little scene such as this promised to be and study it from the vantage of the prompter. He knew that the principal theme of all great books, of all great dramas, was antagonism, antagonism between man and woman, though by a thousand other names has it been called. He had often said, in a spirit of raillery, that this antagonism was principally due to the fact that Eve had been constructed (and very well) out of a rib from Adam. Naturally she resented this, that she had not been fashioned independently, and would hold it against man until the true secret of the parable was made clear to her.

"Sing that, Padre?" said Nora. "Why, there are no words to it that I know."

"Words? *Peste!* Who cares for words no one really ever understands? It is the

voice, my child. Go on, or I shall make you do some frightful penance."

Nora saw that further opposition would be useless. After all, it would be better to sing. She would not be compelled to look at this man she so despised. For a moment her tones were not quite clear; but Celeste increased the volume of sound warningly, and as this required more force on Nora's part, the little cross-current was passed without mishap. It was mere pastime for her to follow these wonderful melodies. She had no words to recall so that her voice was free to do with as she elected. There were bars absolutely impossible to follow, note for note, but she got around this difficulty by taking the key and holding it strongly and evenly. In ordinary times Nora never refused to sing for her guests, if she happened to be in voice. There was none of that conceited arrogance behind which most of the vocal celebrities hide themselves. At the beginning she had intended to sing badly; but

as the music proceeded, she sang as she had not sung in weeks. To fill this man's soul with a hunger for the sound of her voice, to pour into his heart a fresh knowledge of what he had lost forever and forever!

Courtlandt sat on the divan beside Harrigan who, with that friendly spirit which he observed toward all whom he liked, whether of long or short acquaintance, had thrown his arm across Courtlandt's shoulder. The younger man understood all that lay behind the simple gesture, and he was secretly pleased.

But Mrs. Harrigan was not. She was openly displeased, and in vain she tried to catch the eye of her wayward lord. A man he had known but twenty-four hours, and to greet him with such coarse familiarity!

Celeste was not wholly unmerciful. She did not finish the suite, but turned from the keys after the final chords of *Morning Mood*.

"Thank you!" said Nora.

"Do not stop," begged Courtlandt.

Nora looked directly into his eyes as she replied: "One's voice can not go on forever, and mine is not at all strong."

And thus, without having originally the least intent to do so, they broke the mutual contract on which they had separately and secretly agreed: never to speak directly to each other. Nora was first to realize what she had done, and she was furiously angry with herself. She left the piano.

As if her mind had opened suddenly like a book, Courtlandt sprang from the divan and reached for the fat ball of lace-hemming. He sat down in Nora's chair and nodded significantly to the Barone, who blushed. To hold the delicate material for Nora's unwinding was a privilege of the gods, but to hold it for this man for whom he held a dim feeling of antagonism was altogether a different matter.

"It is horribly tangled," he admitted, hoping thus to escape.

"No matter. You hold the ball. I'll un-

tangle it. I never saw a fish-line I could not straighten out."

Nora laughed. It was not possible for her to repress the sound. Her sense of humor was too strong in this case to be denied its release in laughter. It was free of the subtler emotions; frank merriment, no more, no less. And possessing the hunter's extraordinarily keen ear, Courtlandt recognized the quality; and the weight of a thousand worlds lightened its pressure upon his heart. And the Barone laughed, too. So there they were, the three of them. But Nora's ineffectual battle for repression had driven her near to hysteria. To escape this dire calamity, she flung open a casement window and stood within it, breathing in the heavy fragrance of the rain-laden air.

This little comedy had the effect of relaxing them all; and the laughter became general. Abbott's smile faded soonest. He stared at his friend in wonder not wholly free from a

sense of evil fortune. Never had he known Courtlandt to aspire to be a squire of dames. To see the Barone hold the ball as if it were hot shot was amusing; but the cool imperturbable manner with which Courtlandt proceeded to untangle the snarl was disturbing. Why the deuce wasn't he himself big and strong, silent and purposeful, instead of being a dawdling fool of an artist?

No answer came to his inquiry, but there was a knock at the door. The managing director handed Harrigan a card.

"Herr Rosen," he read aloud. "Send him up. Some friend of yours, Nora; Herr Rosen. I told Mr. Jilli to send him up."

The padre drew his feet under his cassock, a sign of perturbation; Courtlandt continued to unwind; the Barone glanced fiercely at Nora, who smiled enigmatically.

CHAPTER XV

HERR ROSEN'S REGRETS

HERR ROSEN! There was no outward reason why the name should have set a chill on them all, turned them into expectant statues. Yet, all semblance of good-fellowship was instantly gone. To Mrs. Harrigan alone did the name convey a sense of responsibility, a flutter of apprehension not unmixed with delight. She put her own work behind the piano lid, swooped down upon the two men and snatched away the lace-hemming, to the infinite relief of the one and the surprise of the other. Courtlandt would have liked nothing better than to hold the lace in his lap, for it was possible that Herr Rosen might wish to shake hands, however disinclined he might be within to perform such greeting. The lace

disappeared. Mrs. Harrigan smoothed out the wrinkles in her dress. From the others there had been little movement and no sound to speak of. Harrigan still waited by the door, seriously contemplating the bit of paste-board in his hand.

Nora did not want to look, but curiosity drew her eyes imperiously toward Courtlandt. He had not risen. Did he know? Did he understand? Was his attitude pretense or innocence? Ah, if she could but look behind that impenetrable mask! How she hated him! The effrontery of it all! And she could do nothing, say nothing: dared not tell them then and there what he truly was, a despicable scoundrel! The son of her father's dearest friend; what mockery! A friend of the family! It was maddening.

Herr Rosen brushed past Harrigan uncere-
moniously, without pausing, and went straight
over to Nora, who was thereupon seized by an
uncontrollable spirit of devilment. She hated

Herr Rosen, but she was going to be as pleasant and as engaging as she knew how to be. She did not care if he misinterpreted her mood. She welcomed him with a hand. He went on to Mrs. Harrigan, who colored pleasantly. He was then introduced, and he acknowledged each introduction with a careless nod. He was there to see Nora, and he did not propose to put himself to any inconvenience on account of the others.

The temporary restraint which had settled upon the others at the announcement of Herr Rosen's arrival passed away. Courtlandt, who had remained seated during the initial formalities (a fact which bewildered Abbott, who knew how punctilious his friend was in matters of this kind), got up and took a third of the divan.

Harrigan dropped down beside him. It was his habit to watch his daughter's face when any guest arrived. He formed his impression on what he believed to be hers. That she

was a consummate actress never entered into his calculations. The welcoming smile dissipated any doubts.

"No matter where we are, they keep coming. She has as many friends as T. R. I never bother to keep track of 'em."

"It would be rather difficult," assented Courtlandt.

"You ought to see the flowers. Loads of 'em. And say, what do you think? Every jewel that comes she turns into money and gives to charity. Can you beat it? Fine joke on the Johnnies. Of course, I mean stones that turn up anonymously. Those that have cards go back by fast-mail. It's a good thing I don't chance across the senders. Now, boy, I want you to feel at home here in this family; I want you to come up when you want to and at any old time of day. I kind of want to pay back to you all the kind things your dad did for me. And I don't want any Oh-pshawing. Get me?"

"Whatever you say. If my dad did you any favors it was because he liked and admired you; not with any idea of having you discharge the debt in the future by way of inconveniencing yourself on my account. Just let me be a friend of the family, like Abbott here. That would be quite enough honor for me."

"You're on! Say, that blacksmith yarn was a corker. He was a game old codger. That was scrapping; no hall full of tobacco-smoke, no palm-fans, lemonade, peanuts and pop-corn; just right out on the turf, and may the best man win. I know. I went through that. No frame-ups, all square and on the level. A fellow had to fight those days, no sparring, no pretty footwork. Sometimes I've a hankering to get back and exchange a wallop or two. Nothing to it, though. My wife won't let me, as the song goes."

Courtlandt chuckled. "I suppose it's the monotony. A man who has been active hates

to sit down and twiddle his thumbs. You exercise?"

"Walk a lot."

"Climb any?"

"Don't know that game."

"It's great sport. I'll break you in some day, if you say. You'll like it. The mountains around here are not dangerous. We can go up and down in a day."

"I'll go you. But, say, last night Nora chucked a bunch of daisies out of the window, and as I was nosing around in the vineyard, I came across it. You know how a chap will absently pick a bunch of flowers apart. What do you think I found?"

"A note?"

"This." Harrigan exhibited the emerald. "Who sent it? Where the dickens did it come from?"

Courtlandt took the stone and examined it carefully. "That's not a bad stone. Uncut but polished; oriental."

"Oriental, eh? What would you say it was worth?"

"Oh, somewhere between six and seven hundred."

"Suffering shamrocks! A little green pebble like this?"

"Cut and flawless, at that size, it would be worth pounds instead of dollars."

"Well, what do you think of that? Nora told me to keep it, so I guess I will."

"Why, yes. If a man sends a thing like this anonymously, he can't possibly complain. Have it made into a stick pin." Courtlandt returned the stone which Harrigan pocketed.

"Sometimes I wish Nora'd marry and settle down."

"She is young. You wouldn't have quit the game at her age!"

"I should say not! But that's different. A man's business is to fight for his grub, whether in an office or in the ring. That's a part of the game. But a woman ought to

have a home, live in it three-fourths of the year, and bring up good citizens. That's what we are all here for. Molly used to stay at home, but now it's the social bug, gadding from morning until night. Ah, here's Carlos with the tea."

Herr Rosen instantly usurped the chair next to Nora, who began to pour the tea. He had come up from the village prepared for a disagreeable half-hour. Instead of being greeted with icy glances from stormy eyes, he encountered such smiles as this adorable creature had never before bestowed upon him. He was in the clouds. That night at Cadenabbia had apparently knocked the bottom out of his dream. Women were riddles which only they themselves could solve for others. For this one woman he was perfectly ready to throw everything aside. A man lived but once; and he was a fool who would hold to tinsel in preference to such happiness as he thought he saw opening out before him. Nora saw, but she

did not care. That in order to reach another she was practising infinite cruelty on this man (whose one fault lay in that he loved her) did not appeal to her pity. But her arrow flew wide of the target; at least, there appeared no result to her archery in malice. Not once had the intended victim looked over to where she sat. And yet she knew that he must be watching; he could not possibly avoid it and be human. And when he finally came forward to take his cup, she leaned toward Herr Rosen.

"You take two lumps?" she asked sweetly. It was only a chance shot, but she hit on the truth.

"And you remember?" excitedly.

"One lump for mine, please," said Courtlandt, smiling.

She picked up a cube of sugar and dropped it into his cup. She had the air of one wishing it were poison. The recipient of this good will, with perfect understanding, returned to the divan, where the padre and Harrigan were

gravely toasting each other with Benedictine.

Nora made no mistake with either Abbott's cup or the Barone's; but the two men were filled with but one desire, to throw Herr Rosen out of the window. What had begun as a beautiful day was now becoming black and uncertain.

The Barone could control every feature save his eyes, and these openly admitted deep anger. He recollected Herr Rosen well enough. The encounter over at Cadenabbia was not the first by many. Herr Rosen! His presence in this room under that name was an insult, and he intended to call the interloper to account the very first opportunity he found.

Perhaps Celeste, sitting as quiet as a mouse upon the piano-stool, was the only one who saw these strange currents drifting dangerously about. That her own heart ached miserably did not prevent her from observing things with all her usual keenness. Ah, Nora,

Nora, who have everything to give and yet give nothing, why do you play so heartless a game? Why hurt those who can no more help loving you than the earth can help whirling around the calm dispassionate sun? Always they turn to you, while I, who have so much to give, am given nothing! She set down her tea-cup and began the aria from *La Bohème*.

Nora, without relaxing the false smile, suddenly found emptiness in everything.

"Sing!" said Herr Rosen.

"I am too tired. Some other time."

He did not press her. Instead, he whispered in his own tongue: "You are the most adorable woman in the world!"

And Nora turned upon him a pair of eyes blank with astonishment. It was as though she had been asleep and he had rudely awakened her. His infatuation blinded him to the truth; he saw in the look a feminine desire to throw the others off the track as to the sentiment expressed in his whispered words.

The hour passed tolerably well. Herr Rosen then observed the time, rose and excused himself. He took the steps leading abruptly down the terrace to the carriage road. He had come by the other way, the rambling stone stairs which began at the porter's lodge, back of the villa.

"Padre," whispered Courtlandt, "I am going. Do not follow. I shall explain to you when we meet again."

The padre signified that he understood. Harrigan protested vigorously, but smiling and shaking his head, Courtlandt went away.

Nora ran to the window. She could see Herr Rosen striding along, down the winding road, his head in the air. Presently, from behind a cluster of mulberries, the figure of another man came into view. He was going at a dog-trot, his hat settled at an angle that permitted the rain to beat squarely into his face. The next turn in the road shut them both from sight. But Nora did not stir.

Herr Rosen stopped and turned.

"You called?"

"Yes." Courtlandt had caught up with him just as Herr Rosen was about to open the gates. "Just a moment, Herr Rosen," with a hand upon the bars. "I shall not detain you long."

There was studied insolence in the tones and the gestures which accompanied them.

"Be brief, if you please."

"My name is Edward Courtlandt, as doubtless you have heard."

"In a large room it is difficult to remember all the introductions."

"Precisely. That is why I take the liberty of recalling it to you, so that you will not forget it," urbanely.

A pause. Dark patches of water were spreading across their shoulders. Little rivulets ran down Courtlandt's arm, raised as it was against the bars.

"I do not see how it may concern me," re-

plied Herr Rosen finally with an insolence more marked than Courtlandt's.

"In Paris we met one night, at the stage entrance of the Opera, I pushed you aside, not knowing who you were. You had offered your services; the door of Miss Harrigan's limousine."

"It was you?" scowling.

"I apologize for that. To-morrow morning you will leave Bellaggio for Varenna. Somewhere between nine and ten the fast train leaves for Milan."

"Varenna! Milan!"

"Exactly. You speak English as naturally and fluently as if you were born to the tongue. Thus, you will leave for Milan. What becomes of you after that is of no consequence to me. Am I making myself clear?"

"*Verdampt!* Do I believe my ears?" furiously. "Are you telling me to leave Bellaggio to-morrow morning?"

"As directly as I can."

Herr Rosen's face became as red as his name. He was a brave young man, but there was danger of an active kind in the blue eyes boring into his own. If it came to a physical contest, he realized that he would get the worst of it. He put his hand to his throat; his very impotence was choking him.

"Your Highness . . ."

"Highness!" Herr Rosen stepped back.

"Yes. Your Highness will readily see the wisdom of my concern for your hasty departure when I add that I know all about the little house in Versailles, that my knowledge is shared by the chief of the Parisian police and the minister of war. If you annoy Miss Harrigan with your equivocal attentions . . ."

"*Gott!* This is too much!"

"Wait! I am stronger than you are. Do not make me force you to hear me to the end. You have gone about this intrigue like a black-guard, and that I know your Highness not to be. The matter is, you are young, you have

always had your way, you have not learnt restraint. Your presence here is an insult to Miss Harrigan, and if she was pleasant to you this afternoon it was for my benefit. If you do not go, I shall expose you." Courtlandt opened the gate.

"And if I refuse?"

"Why, in that case, being the American that I am, without any particular reverence for royalty or nobility, as it is known, I promise to thrash you soundly to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, in the dining-room, in the bureau, the drawing-room, wherever I may happen to find you."

Courtlandt turned on his heel and hurried back to the villa. He did not look over his shoulder. If he had, he might have felt pity for the young man who leaned heavily against the gate, his burning face pressed upon his rain-soaked sleeve.

When Courtlandt knocked at the door and

was admitted, he apologized. "I came back for my umbrella."

"Umbrella!" exclaimed the padre. "Why, we had no umbrellas. We came up in a carriage which is probably waiting for us this very minute by the porter's lodge."

"Well, I am certainly absent-minded!"

"Absent-minded!" scoffed Abbott. "You never forgot anything in all your life, unless it was to go to bed. You wanted an excuse to come back."

"Any excuse would be a good one in that case. I think we'd better be going, Padre. And by the way, Herr Rosen begged me to present his regrets. He is leaving Bellaggio in the morning."

Nora turned her face once more to the window.

CHAPTER XVI

THE APPLE OF DISCORD

“**I**T is all very petty, my child,” said the padre. “Life is made up of bigger things; the little ones should be ignored.”

To which Nora replied: “To a woman, the little things are everything; they are the daily routine, the expected, the necessary things. What you call the big things in life are accidents. And, oh! I have pride.” She folded her arms across her heaving bosom; for the padre’s directness this morning had stirred her deeply.

“Wilfulness is called pride by some; and stubbornness. But you know, as well as I do, that yours is resentment, anger, indignation. Yes, you have pride, but it has not been brought into this affair. Pride is that within

which prevents us from doing mean or sordid acts; and you could not do one or the other if you tried. The sentiment in you which should be developed”

“Is mercy?”

“No; justice, the patience to weigh the right or wrong of a thing.”

“Padre, I have eyes, eyes; I *saw*.”

He twirled the middle button of his cassock.

“The eyes see and the ears hear, but these are only witnesses, laying the matter before the court of the last resort, which is the mind. It is there we sift the evidence.”

“He had the insufferable insolence to order Herr Rosen to leave,” going around the barrier of his well-ordered logic.

“Ah! Now, how could he send away Herr Rosen if that gentleman had really preferred to stay?”

Nora looked confused.

“Shall I tell you? I suspected; so I questioned him last night. Had I been in his

place, I should have chastised Herr Rosen instead of bidding him be gone. It was he."

Nora sat down.

"Positively. The men who guarded you were two actors from one of the theaters. He did not come to Versailles because he was being watched. He was found and sent home the night before your release."

"I am sorry. But it was so like *him*."

The padre spread his hands. "What a way women have of modifying either good or bad impulses! It would have been fine of you to have stopped when you said you were sorry."

"Padre, one would believe that you had taken up his defense!"

"If I had I should have to leave it after to-day. I return to Rome to-morrow and shall not see you again before you go to America. I have bidden good-by to all save you. My child, my last admonition is, be patient; observe; guard against that impulse born in your blood to move hastily, to form opin-

ions without solid foundations. Be happy while you are young, for old age is happy only in that reflected happiness of recollection. Write to me, here. I return in November. *Benedicite?*" smiling.

Nora bowed her head and he put a hand upon it.

"And listen to this," began Harrigan, turning over a page. "'It is considered bad form to call the butler to your side when you are a guest. Catch his eye. He will understand that something is wanted.' How's that?"

"That's the way to live." Courtlandt grinned, and tilted back his chair until it rested against the oak.

The morning was clear and mild. Fresh snow lay upon the mountain tops; later it would disappear. The fountain tinkled, and swallows darted hither and thither under the sparkling spray. The gardeners below in the vegetable patch were singing. By the door of

the villa sat two old ladies, breakfasting in the sunshine. There was a hint of lavender in the lazy drifting air. A dozen yards away sat Abbott, two or three brushes between his teeth and one in his hand. A little behind was Celeste, sewing posies upon one of those squares of linen toward which all women in their idle moments are inclined, and which, on finishing, they immediately stow away in the bottom of some trunk against the day when they have a home of their own, or marry, or find some one ignorant enough to accept it as a gift.

“‘And when in doubt,’” continued Harrigan, “‘watch how other persons use their forks.’ Can you beat it? And say, honest, Molly bought that for me to read and study. And I never piped the subtitle until this morning. ‘Advice to young ladies upon going into society.’ Huh?” Harrigan slapped his knee with the book and roared out his keen enjoyment. Somehow he seemed to be more at

ease with this young fellow than with any other man he had met in years. "But for the love of Mike, don't say anything to Molly," fearfully. "Oh, she means the best in the world," contritely. "I'm always embarrassing her; shoe-strings that don't match, a busted stud in my shirt-front, and there isn't a pair of white-kids made that'll stay whole more than five minutes on these paws. I suppose it's because I don't think. After all, I'm only a retired pug." The old fellow's eyes sparkled suspiciously. "The best two women in all the world, and I don't want them to be ashamed of me."

"Why, Mr. Harrigan," said Courtlandt, letting his chair fall into place so that he could lay a hand affectionately upon the other's knee, "neither of them would be worth their salt if they ever felt ashamed of you. What do you care what strangers think or say? You know. You've seen life. You've stepped off the stage and carried with you the recollection of decent

living, of playing square, of doing the best you could. The worst scoundrels I ever met never made any mistake with their forks. Perhaps you don't know it, but my father became rich because he could judge a man's worth almost at sight. And he kept this fortune and added to it because he chose half a dozen friends and refused to enlarge the list. If you became his friend, he had good reason for making you such."

"Well, we did have some good times together," Harrigan admitted, with a glow in his heart. "And I guess after all that I'll go to the ball with Molly. I don't mind teas like we had at the colonel's, but dinners and balls I have drawn the line at. I'll take the plunge to-night. There's always some place for a chap to smoke."

"At the Villa Rosa? I'll be there myself; and any time you are in doubt, don't be afraid to question me."

"You're in class A," heartily. "But there's

one thing that worries me,—Nora. She's gone up so high, and she's such a wonderful girl, that all the men in Christendom are hikin' after her. And some of 'em. . . . Well, Molly says it isn't good form to wallop a man over here. Why, she went on her lonesome to India and Japan, with nobody but her maid; and never put us hep until she landed in Bombay. The men out that way aren't the best. East of Suez, you know. And that chap yesterday, Herr Rosen. Did you see the way he hiked by me when I let him in? He took me to be the round number before one. And he didn't speak a dozen words to any but Nora. Not that I mind that; but it was something in the way he did it that scratched me the wrong way. The man who thinks he's going to get Nora by walking over me, has got a guess coming. Of course, it's meat and drink to Molly to have sons of grand dukes and kings trailing around. She says it gives tone."

"Isn't she afraid sometimes?"

"Afraid? I should say not! There's only three things that Molly's afraid of these days: a spool of thread, a needle, and a button."

Courtlandt laughed frankly. "I really don't think you need worry about Herr Rosen. He has gone, and he will not come back."

"Say! I'll bet a dollar it was you who shoo'd him off."

"Yes. But it was undoubtedly an impertinence on my part, and I'd rather you would not disclose my officiousness to Miss Harri-gan."

"Piffle! If you knew him you had a perfect right to pass him back his ticket. Who was he?"

Courtlandt poked at the gravel with his cane.

"One of the big guns?"

Courtlandt nodded.

"So big that he couldn't have married my girl even if he loved her?"

"Yes. As big as that."

Harrigan riffled the leaves of his book. "What do you say to going down to the hotel and having a game of *bazzica*, as they call billiards here?"

"Nothing would please me better," said Courtlandt, relieved that Harrigan did not press him for further revelations.

"Nora is studying a new opera, and Molly-O is ragging the village dressmaker. It's only half after ten, and we can whack 'em around until noon. I warn you, I'm something of a shark."

"I'll lay you the cigars that I beat you."

"You're on!"

Harrigan put the book in his pocket, and the two of them made for the upper path, not, however, without waving a friendly adieu to Celeste, who was watching them with much curiosity.

For a moment Nora became visible in the window. Her expression did not signify that the sight of the men together pleased her. On

the contrary, her eyes burned and her brow was ruffled by several wrinkles which threatened to become permanent if the condition of affairs continued to remain as it was. To her the calm placidity of the man was nothing less than monumental impudence. How she hated him; how bitterly, how intensely she hated him! She withdrew from the window without having been seen.

"Did you ever see two finer specimens of man?" Celeste asked of Abbott.

"What? Who?" mumbled Abbott, whose forehead was puckered with impatience. "Oh, those two? They *are* well set up. But what the deuce *is* the matter with this foreground?" taking the brushes from his teeth. "I've been hammering away at it for a week, and it does not get there yet."

Celeste rose and laid aside her work. She stood behind him and studied the picture through half-closed critical eyes. "You have painted it over too many times." Then she

looked down at the shapely head. Ah, the longing to put her hands upon it, to run her fingers through the tousled hair, to touch it with her lips! But no! "Perhaps you are tired; perhaps you have worked too hard. Why not put aside your brushes for a week?"

"I've a good mind to chuck it into the lake. I simply can't paint any more." He flung down the brushes. "I'm a fool, Celeste, a fool. I'm crying for the moon, that's what the matter is. What's the use of beating about the bush? You know as well as I do that it's Nora."

Her heart contracted, and for a little while she could not see him clearly.

"But what earthly chance have I?" he went on, innocently but ruthlessly. "No one can help loving Nora."

"No," in a small voice.

"It's all rot, this talk about affinities. There's always some poor devil left outside. But who can help loving Nora?" he repeated.

"Who indeed!"

"And there's not the least chance in the world for me."

"You never can tell until you put it to the test."

"Do you think I have a chance? Is it possible that Nora may care a little for me?" He turned his head toward her eagerly.

"Who knows?" She wanted him to have it over with, to learn the truth that to Nora Harrigan he would never be more than an amiable comrade. He would then have none to turn to but her. What mattered it if her own heart ached so she might soothe the hurt in his? She laid a hand upon his shoulder, so lightly that he was only dimly conscious of the contact.

"It's a rummy old world. Here I've gone alone all these years . . ."

"Twenty-six!" smiling.

"Well, that's a long time. Never bothered my head about a woman. Selfish, perhaps.

Had a good time, came and went as I pleased.
And then I met Nora."

"Yes."

"If only she'd been stand-offish, like these other singers, why, I'd have been all right to-day. But she's such a brick! She's such a good fellow! She treats us all alike; sings when we ask her to; always ready for a romp. Think of her making us all take the *Kneip-cure* the other night! And we marched around the fountain singing 'Mary had a little lamb.' Barefooted in the grass! When a man marries he doesn't want a wife half so much as a good comrade; somebody to slap him on the back in the morning to hearten him up for the day's work; and to cuddle him up when he comes home tired, or disappointed, or unsuccessful. No matter what mood he's in. Is my English getting away from you?"

"No; I understand all you say." Her hand rested a trifle heavier upon his shoulder, that was all.

"Nora would be that kind of a wife. 'Honor, anger, valor, fire,' as Stevenson says. Hang the picture; what am I going to do with it?"

"'Honor, anger, valor, fire,'" Celeste repeated slowly. "Yes, that is Nora." A bitter little smile moved her lips as she recalled the happenings of the last two days. But no; he must find out for himself; he must meet the hurt from Nora, not from her. "How long, Abbott, have you known your friend Mr. Courtlandt?"

"Boys together," playing a light tattoo with his mahl-stick.

"How old is he?"

"About thirty-two or three."

"He is very rich?"

"Oceans of money; throws it away, but not fast enough to get rid of it."

"He is what you say in English . . . wild?"

"Well," with mock gravity, "I shouldn't

like to be the tiger that crossed his path. Wild; that's the word for it."

"You are laughing. Ah, I know! I should say dissipated."

"Courtlandt? Come, now, Celeste; does he look dissipated?"

"No-o."

"He drinks when he chooses, he flirts with a pretty woman when he chooses, he smokes the finest tobacco there is when he chooses; and he gives them all up when he chooses. He is like the seasons; he comes and goes, and nobody can change his habits."

"He has had no affair?"

"Why, Courtlandt hasn't any heart. It's a mechanical device to keep his blood in circulation; that's all. I am the most intimate friend he has, and yet I know no more than you how he lives and where he goes."

She let her hand fall from his shoulder. She was glad that he did not know.

"But look!" she cried in warning.

Abbott looked.

A woman was coming serenely down the path from the wooded promontory, a woman undeniably handsome in a cedar-tinted linen dress, exquisitely fashioned, with a touch of vivid scarlet on her hat and a most tantalizing flash of scarlet ankle. It was Flora Desimone, fresh from her morning bath and a substantial breakfast. The errand that had brought her from Aix-les-Bains was confessedly a merciful one. But she possessed the dramatist's instinct to prolong a situation. Thus, to make her act of mercy seem infinitely larger than it was, she was determined first to cast the Apple of Discord into this charming corner of Eden. The Apple of Discord, as every man knows, is the only thing a woman can throw with any accuracy.

The artist snatched up his brushes, and ruined the painting forthwith, for all time. The foreground was, in his opinion, beyond redemption; so, with a savage humor, he rap-

idly limned in a score of impossible trees, turned midday into sunset, with a riot of colors which would have made the Chinese New-year in Canton a drab and sober event in comparison. He hated Flora Desimone, as all Nora's adherents most properly did, but with a hatred wholly reflective and adapted to Nora's moods.

"You have spoiled it!" cried Celeste. She had watched the picture grow, and to see it ruthlessly destroyed this way hurt her. "How could you!"

"Worst I ever did." He began to change the whole effect, chuckling audibly as he worked. Sunset divided honors with moonlight. It was no longer incongruous; it was ridiculous. He leaned back and laughed. "I'm going to send it to L'Asino, and call it an afterthought."

"Give it to me."

"What?"

"Yes."

"Nonsense! I'm going to touch a match to

it. I'll give you that picture with the lavender in bloom."

"I want this."

"But you can not hang it."

"I want it."

"Well!" The more he learned about women the farther out of mental reach they seemed to go. Why on earth did she want this execrable daub? "You may have it; but all the same, I'm going to call an oculist and have him examine your eyes."

"Why, it is the Signorina Fournier!"

In preparing studiously to ignore Flora Desimone's presence they had forgotten all about her.

"Good morning, Signora," said Celeste in Italian.

"And the Signore Abbott, the painter, also!" The Calabrian raised what she considered her most deadly weapon, her lorgnette.

Celeste had her fancy-work instantly in her two hands; Abbott's were occupied; Flora's

hands were likewise engaged; thus, the insipid mockery of hand-shaking was nicely and excusably avoided.

"What is it?" asked Flora, squinting.

"It is a new style of the impressionist which I began this morning," soberly.

"It looks very natural," observed Flora.

"Natural!" Abbott dropped his mahlstick.

"It is Vesuv', is it not, on a cloudy day?"

This was too much for Abbott's gravity, and he laughed.

"It was not necessary to spoil a good picture . . . on my account," said Flora, closing the lorgnette with a snap. Her great dark eyes were dreamy and contemplative like a cat's, and, as every one knows, a cat's eye is the most observing of all eyes. It is quite in the order of things, since a cat's attitude toward the world is by need and experience wholly defensive.

"The Signora is wrong. I did not spoil it

on her account. It was past helping yesterday. But I shall, however, rechristen it Vesuvius, since it represents an eruption of temper."

Flora tapped the handle of her parasol with the lorgnette. It was distinctly a sign of approval. These Americans were never slow-witted. She swung the parasol to and fro, slowly, like a pendulum.

"It is too bad," she said, her glance roving over the white walls of the villa.

"It was irrevocably lost," Abbott declared.

"No, no; I do not mean the picture. I am thinking of La Toscana. Her voice was really superb; and to lose it entirely . . . !" She waved a sympathetic hand.

Abbott was about to rise up in vigorous protest. But fate itself chose to rebuke Flora. From the window came—"Sai cos' ebbe cuore!"—sung as only Nora could sing it.

The ferrule of Flora Desimone's parasol bit deeply into the clover-turf.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BALL AT THE VILLA

“**D**O you know the Duchessa?” asked Flora Desimone.

“Yes.” It was three o’clock the same afternoon. The duke sat with his wife under the vine-clad trattoria on the quay. Between his knees he held his Panama hat, which was filled with ripe hazelnuts. He cracked them vigorously with his strong white teeth and filliped the broken shells into the lake, where a frantic little fish called *agoni* darted in and about the slowly sinking particles. “Why?” The duke was not any grayer than he had been four or five months previous, but the characteristic expression of his features had undergone a change. He looked less Jovian than Job-like.

"I want you to get an invitation to her ball at the Villa Rosa to-night."

"We haven't been here twenty-four hours!" in mild protest.

"What has that to do with it? It doesn't make any difference."

"I suppose not." He cracked and ate a nut. "Where is he?"

"He has gone to Milan. He left hurriedly. He's a fool," impatiently.

"Not necessarily. Foolishness is one thing and discretion is another. Oh, well; his presence here was not absolutely essential. Presently he will marry and settle down and be a good boy." The next nut was withered, and he tossed it aside. "Is her voice really gone?"

"No." Flora leaned with her arms upon the railing and glared at the wimpling water. She had carried the Apple of Discord up the hill and down again. Nora had been indisposed.

"I am glad of that."

She turned the glare upon him.

"I am very glad of that, considering your part in the affair."

"Michael . . . !"

"Be careful. Michael is always a prelude to a temper. Have one of these," offering a nut.

She struck it rudely from his hand.

"Sometimes I am tempted to put my two hands around that exquisite neck of yours."

"Try it."

"No, I do not believe it would be wise. But if ever I find out that you have lied to me, that you loved the fellow and married me out of spite" He completed the sentence by suggestively crunching a nut.

The sullen expression on her face gave place to a smile. "I should like to see you in a rage."

"No, my heart; you would like nothing of the sort. I understand you better than you

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know; that accounts for my patience. You are Italian. You are caprice and mood. I come from a cold land. If ever I do get angry, run, run as fast as ever you can."

Flora was not, among other things, frivolous or light-headed. There was an earthquake hidden somewhere in this quiet docile man, and the innate deviltry of the woman was always trying to dig down to it. But she never deceived herself. Some day this earthquake would open up and devour her.

"I hate him. He snubbed me. I have told you that a thousand times."

He laughed and rattled the nuts in his hat.

"I want you to get that invitation."

"And if I do not?"

"I shall return immediately to Paris."

"And break your word to me?"

"As easily as you break one of these nuts."

"And if I get the invitation?"

"I shall fulfil my promise to the letter. I will tell her as I promised,"

"Out of love for me?"

"Out of love for you, and because the play no longer interests me."

"I wonder what new devilment is at work in your mind?"

"Michael, I do not want to get into a temper. It makes lines in my face. I hate this place. It is dead. I want life, and color, and music. I want the rest of September in Ostend."

"Paris, Capri, Taormina, Ostend; I marvel if ever you will be content to stay in one place long enough for me to get my breath?"

"My bear, I am young. One of these days I shall be content to sit by your great Russian fireplace and hold your hand."

"Hold it now."

She laughed and pressed his hand between her own. "Michael, look me straight in the eyes." He did so willingly enough. "There is no other man. And if you ever look at another woman . . . Well!"

"I'll send over for the invitation." He stuffed his pockets with nuts and put on his hat.

Flora then proceeded secretly to polish once more the Apple of Discord which, a deal tarnished for lack of use, she had been compelled to bring down from the promontory.

"Am I all right?" asked Harrigan.

Courtlandt nodded. "You look like a soldier in mufti, and more than that, like the gentleman that you naturally are," quite sincerely.

The ex-gladiator blushed. "This is the reception-room. There's the ballroom right out there. The smoking-room is on the other side. Now, how in the old Harry am I going to get across without killing some one?"

Courtlandt resisted the desire to laugh.

"Supposing you let me pilot you over?"

"You're the referee. Ring the gong."

"Come on, then."

"What! while they are dancing?" backing away in dismay.

The other caught him by the arm. "Come on."

And in and out they went, hither and thither, now dodging, now pausing to let the swirl pass, until at length Harrigan found himself safe on shore, in the dim cool smoking-room.

"I don't see how you did it," admiringly.

"I'll drop in every little while to see how you are getting on," volunteered Courtlandt.

"You can sit by the door if you care to see them dance. I'm off to see Mrs. Harrigan and tell her where you are. Here's a cigar."

Harrigan turned the cigar over and over in his fingers, all the while gazing at the young man's diminishing back. He sighed. *That* would make him the happiest man in the world. He examined the carnelian band encircling the six-inches of evanescent happiness. "What do you think of that!" he murmured.

"Same brand the old boy used to smoke. And if he pays anything less than sixty apiece for 'em at wholesale, I'll eat this one." Then he directed his attention to the casual inspection of the room. A few elderly men were lounging about. His sympathy was at once mutely extended; it was plain that they too had been dragged out. At the little smoker's tabouret by the door he espied two chairs, one of which was unoccupied; and he at once appropriated it. The other chair was totally obscured by the bulk of the man who sat in it; a man, bearded, blunt-nosed, passive, but whose eyes were bright and twinkling. Hanging from his cravat was a medal of some kind. Harrigan lighted his cigar, and gave himself up to the delights of it.

"They should leave us old fellows at home," he ventured.

"Perhaps, in most cases, the women would much prefer that."

"Foreigner," thought Harrigan. "Well, it

does seem that the older we get the greater obstruction we become."

"What is old age?" asked the thick but not unpleasant voice of the stranger.

"It's standing aside. Years don't count at all. A man is as young as he feels."

"And a woman as old as she looks!" laughed the other.

"Now, I don't feel old, and I am fifty-one."

The man with the beard shot an admiring glance across the tabouret. "You are extraordinarily well preserved, sir. You do not seem older than I, and I am but forty."

"The trouble is, over here you play cards all night in stuffy rooms and eat too many sauces." Harrigan had read this somewhere, and he was pleased to think that he could recall it so fittingly.

"Agreed. You Americans are getting out in the open more than any other white people."

"Wonder how he guessed I was from the States?" Aloud, Harrigan said: "You

don't look as though you'd grow any older in the next ten years."

"That depends." The bearded man sighed and lighted a fresh cigarette. "There's a beautiful young woman," with an indicative gesture toward the ballroom.

Harrigan expanded. It was Nora, dancing with the Barone.

"She's the most beautiful young woman in the world," enthusiastically.

"Ah, you know her?" interestedly.

"I am her father!"—as Louis XIV might have said, "I am the State."

The bearded man smiled. "Sir, I congratulate you both."

Courtlandt loomed in the doorway. "Comfortable?"

"Perfectly. Good cigar, comfortable chair, fine view."

The duke eyed Courtlandt through the pall of smoke which he had purposefully blown forth. He questioned, rather amusedly, what

would have happened had he gone down to the main hall that night in Paris? Among the few things he admired was a well-built handsome man. Courtlandt on his part pretended that he did not see.

"You'll find the claret and champagne punches in the hall," suggested Courtlandt.

"Not for mine! Run away and dance."

"Good-by, then." Courtlandt vanished.

"There's a fine chap. Edward Courtlandt, the American millionaire." It was not possible for Harrigan to omit this awe-compelling elaboration.

"Edward Courtlandt." The stranger stretched his legs. "I have heard of him. Something of a hunter."

"One of the keenest."

"There is no half-way with your rich American: either his money ruins him or he runs away from it."

"There's a stunner," exclaimed Harrigan. "Wonder how she got here?"

"To which lady do you refer?"

"The one in scarlet. She is Flora Desimone. She and my daughter sing together sometimes. Of course you have heard of Eleonora da Toscana; that's my daughter's stage name. The two are not on very good terms, naturally."

"Quite naturally," dryly.

"But you can't get away from the Calabrian's beauty," generously.

"No." The bearded man extinguished his cigarette and rose, laying a *carte-de-visite* on the tabouret. "More, I should not care to get away from it. Good evening," pleasantly. The music stopped. He passed on into the crowd.

Harrigan reached over and picked up the card. "Suffering shamrocks! if Molly could only see me now," he murmured. "I wonder if I made any breaks? The grand duke, and me hobnobbing with him like a waiter!

James, this is all under your hat. We'll keep the card where Molly won't find it."

Young men began to drift in and out. The air became heavy with smoke, the prevailing aroma being that of Turkish tobacco of which Harrigan was not at all fond. But his cigar was so good that he was determined not to stir until the coal began to tickle the end of his nose. Since Molly knew where he was there was no occasion to worry.

Abbott came in, pulled a cigarette case out of his pocket, and impatiently struck a match. His hands shook a little, and the flare of the match revealed a pale and angry countenance.

"Hey, Abbott, here's a seat. Get your second wind."

"Thanks." Abbott dropped into the chair and smoked quickly. "Very stuffy out there. Too many."

"You look it. Having a good time?"

"Oh, fine!" There was a catch in the laugh which followed, but Harrigan's ear was

not trained for these subtleties of sound.

"How are you making out?"

"I'm getting acclimated. Where's the colonel to-night? He ought to be around here somewhere."

"I left him a few moments ago."

"When you see him again, send him in. He's a live one, and I like to hear him talk."

"I'll go at once," crushing his cigarette in the Jeypore bowl.

"What's your hurry? You look like a man who has just lost his job."

"Been steering a German countess. She was wound up to turn only one way, and I am groggy. I'll send the colonel over. By-by."

"Now, what's stung the boy?"

Nora was enjoying herself famously. The men hummed around her like bees around the sweetest rose. From time to time she saw Courtlandt hovering about the outskirts. She was glad he had come: the lepidopterist is latent or active in most women; to impale the

butterfly, the moth falls easily into the daily routine. She was laughing and jesting with the men. Her mother stood by, admiringly. This time Courtlandt gently pushed his way to Nora's side.

"May I have a dance?" he asked.

"You are too late," evenly. She was becoming used to the sight of him, much to her amazement.

"I am sorry."

"Why, Nora, I didn't know that your card was filled!" said Mrs. Harrigan. She had the maternal eye upon Courtlandt.

"Nevertheless," said Nora sweetly, "it is a fact."

"I am disconsolate," replied Courtlandt, who had approached for form's sake only, being fully prepared for a refusal. "I have the unfortunate habit of turning up late," with a significance which only Nora understood.

"So, those who are late must suffer the consequences."

"Supper?"

"The Barone rather than you."

The music began again, and Abbott whirled her away. She was dressed in Burmese taffeta, a rich orange. In the dark of her beautiful black hair there was the green luster of emeralds; an Indian-princess necklace of emeralds and pearls was looped around her dazzling white throat. Unconsciously Courtlandt sighed audibly, and Mrs. Harrigan heard this note of unrest.

"Who is that?" asked Mrs. Harrigan.

"Flora Desimone's husband, the duke. He and Mr. Harrigan were having quite a conversation in the smoke-room."

"What!" in consternation.

"They were getting along finely when I left them."

Mrs. Harrigan felt her heart sink. The duke and James together meant nothing short of a catastrophe; for James would not know whom he was addressing, and would make all

manner of confidences. She knew something would happen if she let him out of her sight. He was eternally talking to strangers.

"Would you mind telling Mr. Harrigan that I wish to see him?"

"Not at all."

Nora stopped at the end of the ballroom. "Donald, let us go out into the garden. I want a breath of air. Did you see her?"

"Couldn't help seeing her. It was the duke, I suppose. It appears that he is an old friend of the duchess. We'll go through the conservatory. It's a short-cut."

The night was full of moonshine; it danced upon the water; it fired the filigree tops of the solemn cypress; it laced the lawn with quivering shadows; and heavy hung the cloying perfume of the box-wood hedges.

"*O bellissima notta!*" she sang. "Is it not glorious?"

"Nora," said Abbott, leaning suddenly toward her.

"Don't say it, Donald; please don't. Don't waste your love on me. You are a good man, and I should not be worthy the name of woman if I did not feel proud and sad. I want you always as a friend; and if you decide that can not be, I shall lose faith in everything. I have never had a brother, and in these two short years I have grown to look on you as one. I am sorry. But if you will look back you will see that I never gave you any encouragement. I was never more than your comrade. I have many faults, but I am not naturally a coquette. I know my heart; I know it well."

"Is there another?" in despair.

"Once upon a time, Donald, there was. There is nothing now but ashes. I am telling you this so that it will not be so hard for you to return to the old friendly footing. You are a brave man. Any man is who takes his heart in his hand and offers it to a woman.

You are going to take my hand and promise to be my friend always."

"Ah, Nora!"

"You mustn't, Donald. I can't return to the ballroom with my eyes red. You will never know how a woman on the stage has to fight to earn her bread. And that part is only a skirmish compared to the ceaseless war men wage against her. She has only the fortifications of her wit and her presence of mind. Was I not abducted in the heart of Paris? And but for the cowardice of the man, who knows what might have happened? If I have beauty, God gave it to me to wear, and wear it I will. My father, the padre, you and the Barone; I would not trust any other men living. I am often unhappy, but I do not inflict this unhappiness on others. Be you the same. Be my friend; be brave and fight it out of your heart." Quickly she drew his head toward her and lightly kissed the fore-

head. "There! Ah, Donald, I very much need a friend."

"All right, Nora," bravely indeed, for the pain in his young heart cried out for the ends of the earth in which to hide. "All right! I'm young; maybe I'll get over it in time. Always count on me. You wouldn't mind going back to the ballroom alone, would you? I've got an idea I'd like to smoke over it. No, I'll take you to the end of the conservatory and come back. I can't face the rest of them just now."

Nora had hoped against hope that it was only infatuation, but in the last few days she could not ignore the truth that he really loved her. She had thrown him and Celeste together in vain. Poor Celeste, poor lovely Celeste, who wore her heart upon her sleeve, patent to all eyes save Donald's! Thus, it was with defined purpose that she had lured him this night into the garden. She wanted to disillusion him.

The Barone, glooming in an obscure corner of the conservatory, saw them come in. Abbott's brave young face deceived him. At the door Abbott smiled and bowed and returned to the garden. The Barone rose to follow him. He had committed a theft of which he was genuinely sorry; and he was man enough to seek his rival and apologize. But fate had chosen for him the worst possible time. He had taken but a step forward, when a tableau formed by the door, causing him to pause irresolutely.

Nora was face to face at last with Flora Desimone.

"I wish to speak to you," said the Italian abruptly.

"Nothing you could possibly say would interest me," declared Nora, haughtily and made as if to pass.

"Do not be too sure," insolently.

Their voices were low, but they reached the ears of the Barone, who wished he was any-

where but here. He moved silently behind the palms toward the exit.

"Let me be frank. I hate you and detest you with all my heart," continued Flora. "I have always hated you, with your supercilious airs, you, whose father . . ."

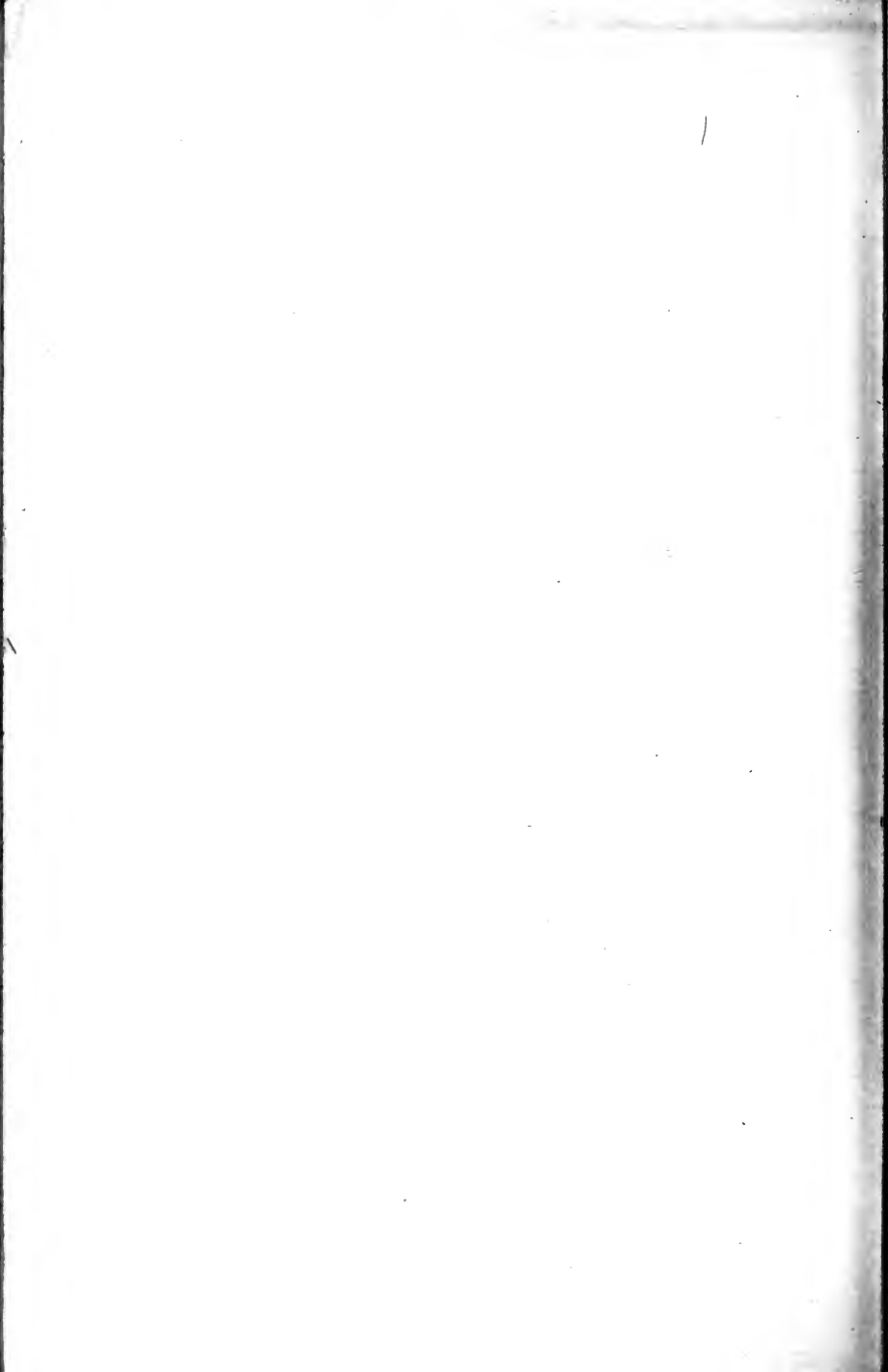
"Don't you dare to say an ill word of him!" cried Nora, her Irish blood throwing hauteur to the winds. "He is kind and brave and loyal, and I am proud of him. Say what you will about me; it will not bother me in the least."

The Barone heard no more. By degrees he had reached the exit, and he was mightily relieved to get outside. The Calabrian had chosen her time well, for the conservatory was practically empty. The Barone's eyes searched the shadows and at length discerned Abbott leaning over the parapet.

"Ah!" said Abbott, facing about. "So it is you. You deliberately scratched off my name and substituted your own. It was the



"I hate you and detest you with all my heart."



act of a contemptible cad. And I tell you here and now. A cad!"

The Barone was Italian. He had sought Abbott with the best intentions; to apologize abjectly, distasteful though it might be to his hot blood. Instead, he struck Abbott across the mouth, and the latter promptly knocked him down.

CHAPTER XVIII

PISTOLS FOR TWO

COURTLANDT knocked on the studio door.

"Come in."

He discovered Abbott, stretched out upon the lounge, idly picking at the loose plaster in the wall.

"Hello!" said Abbott carelessly. "Help yourself to a chair."

Instead, Courtlandt walked about the room, aimlessly. He paused at the window; he picked up a sketch and studied it at various angles; he kicked the footstool across the floor, not with any sign of anger but with a seriousness that would have caused Abbott to laugh, had he been looking at his friend. He continued, however, to pluck at the plaster. He had always hated and loved Courtlandt, al-

ternately. He never sought to analyze this peculiar cardiac condition. He only knew that at one time he hated the man, and that at another he would have laid down his life for him. Perhaps it was rather a passive jealousy which he mistook for hatred. Abbott had never envied Courtlandt his riches; but often the sight of Courtlandt's physical superiority, his adaptability, his knowledge of men and affairs, the way he had of anticipating the unspoken wishes of women, his unembarrassed gallantry, these attributes stirred the envy of which he was always manly enough to be ashamed. Courtlandt's unexpected appearance in Bellaggio had also created a suspicion which he could not minutely define. The truth was, when a man loved, every other man became his enemy, not excepting her father: the primordial instinct has survived all the applications of veneer. So, Abbott was not at all pleased to see his friend that morning.

At length Courtlandt returned to the lounge.
"The Barone called upon me this morning."

"Oh, he did?"

"I think you had better write him an apology."

Abbott sat up. He flung the piece of plaster violently to the floor. "Apologize? Well, I like your nerve to come here with that kind of wobble. Look at these lips! Man, he struck me across the mouth, and I knocked him down."

"It was a pretty good wallop, considering that you couldn't see his face very well in the dark. I always said that you had more spunk to the square inch than any other chap I know. But over here, Suds, as you know, it's different. You can't knock down an officer and get away with it. So, you just sit down at your desk and write a little note, saying that you regret your hastiness. I'll see that it goes through all right. Fortunately, no one heard of the row."

"I'll see you both farther!" wrathfully.
"Look at these lips, I say!"

"Before he struck you, you must have given provocation."

"Sha'n't discuss what took place. Nor will I apologize."

"That's final?"

"You have my word for it."

"Well, I'm sorry. The Barone is a decent sort. He gives you the preference, and suggests that you select pistols, since you would be no match for him with rapiers."

"Pistols!" shouted Abbott. "For the love of glory, what are you driving at?"

"The Barone has asked me to be his second. And I have despatched a note to the colonel, advising him to attend to your side. I accepted the Barone's proposition solely that I might get here first and convince you that an apology will save you a heap of discomfort. The Barone is a first-rate shot, and doubtless he will only wing you. But that will mean

scandal and several weeks in the hospital, to say nothing of a devil of a row with the civil authorities. In the army the Italian still fights his *duello*, but these affairs never get into the newspapers, as in France. Seldom, however, is any one seriously hurt. They are excitable, and consequently a good shot is likely to shoot wildly at a pinch. So there you are, my boy."

"Are you in your right mind? Do you mean to tell me that you have come here to arrange a duel?" asked Abbott, his voice low and a bit shaky.

"To prevent one. So, write your apology. Don't worry about the moral side of the question. It's only a fool who will offer himself as a target to a man who knows how to shoot. You couldn't hit the broadside of a barn with a shot-gun."

Abbott brushed the dust from his coat and got up. "A duel!" He laughed a bit hysterically. Well, why not? Since Nora could

never be his, there was no future for him. He might far better serve as a target than to go on living with the pain and bitterness in his heart. "Very well. Tell the Barone my choice is pistols. He may set the time and place himself."

"Go over to that desk and write that apology. If you don't, I promise on my part to tell Nora Harrigan, who, I dare say, is at the bottom of this, innocently or otherwise."

"Courtlandt!"

"I mean just what I say. Take your choice. Stop this nonsense yourself like a reasonable human being, or let Nora Harrigan stop it for you. There will be no duel, not if I can help it."

Abbott saw instantly what would happen. Nora would go to the Barone and beg off for him. "All right! I'll write that apology. But listen: you will knock hereafter when you enter any of my studios. You've kicked out the bottom from the old footing. You are

not the friend you profess to be. You are making me a coward in the eyes of that damned Italian. He will never understand this phase of it." Thereupon Abbott ran over to his desk and scribbled the note, sealing it with a bang. "Here you are. Perhaps you had best go at once."

"Abby, I'm sorry that you take this view."

"I don't care to hear any platitudes, thank you."

"I'll look you up to-morrow, and on my part I sha'n't ask for any apology. In a little while you'll thank me. You will even laugh with me."

"Permit me to doubt that," angrily. He threw open the door.

Courtlandt was too wise to argue further. He had obtained the object of his errand, and that was enough for the present. "Sorry you are not open to reason. Good morning."

When the door closed, Abbott tramped the floor and vented his temper on the much

abused footstool, which he kicked whenever it came in the line of his march. In his soul he knew that Courtlandt was right. More than that, he knew that presently he would seek him and apologize.

Unfortunately, neither of them counted on the colonel.

Without being quite conscious of the act, Abbott took down from the wall an ancient dueling-pistol, cocked it, snapped it, and looked it over with an interest that he had never before bestowed on it. And the colonel, bursting into the studio, found him absorbed in the contemplation of this old death-dealing instrument.

"Ha!" roared the old war dog. "Had an idea that something like this was going to happen. Put that up. You couldn't kill anything with that unless you hit 'em on the head with it. Leave the matter to me. I've a pair of pistols, sighted to hit a shilling at twenty yards. Of course, you can't fight

him with swords. He's one of the best in all Italy. But you've just as good a chance as he has with pistols. Nine times out of ten the tyro hits the bull's-eye, while the crack goes wild. Just you sit jolly tight. Who's his second; Courtlandt?"

"Yes." Abbott was truly and completely bewildered.

"He struck you first, I understand, and you knocked him down. Good! My tennis-courts are out of the way. We can settle this matter to-morrow morning at dawn. Ellicott will come over from Cadenabbia with his saws. He's close-mouthed. All you need to do is to keep quiet. You can spend the night at the villa with me, and I'll give you a few ideas about shooting a pistol. Here; write what I dictate." He pushed Abbott over to the desk and forced him into the chair. Abbott wrote mechanically, as one hypnotized. The colonel seized the letter. "No flowery sentences; a few words bang at the mark.

Come up to the villa as soon as you can. We'll jolly well cool this Italian's blood."

And out he went, banging the door. There was something of the directness of a bullet in the old fellow's methods.

Literally, Abbott had been rushed off his feet. The moment his confusion cleared he saw the predicament into which his own stupidity and the amiable colonel's impetuous good offices had plunged him. He was horrified. Here was Courtlandt carrying the apology, and hot on his heels was the colonel, with the final arrangements for the meeting. He ran to the door, bareheaded, took the stairs three and four at a bound. But the energetic Anglo-Indian had gone down in bounds also; and when the distracted artist reached the street, the other was nowhere to be seen. Apparently there was nothing left but to send another apology. Rather than perform so shameful and cowardly an act he would have cut off his hand.

The Barone, pale and determined, passed the second note to Courtlandt who was congratulating himself (prematurely as will be seen) on the peaceful dispersion of the war-clouds. He was dumfounded.

"You will excuse me," he said meekly. He must see Abbott.

"A moment," interposed the Barone coldly. "If it is to seek another apology, it will be useless. I refuse to accept. Mr. Abbott will fight, or I will publicly brand him, the first opportunity, as a coward."

Courtlandt bit his mustache. "In that case, I shall go at once to Colonel Caxley-Webster."

"Thank you. I shall be in my room at the villa the greater part of the day." The Barone bowed.

Courtlandt caught the colonel as he was entering his motor-boat.

"Come over to tiffin."

"Very well; I can talk here better than anywhere else."

When the motor began its racket, Courtlandt pulled the colonel over to him.

"Do you know what you have done?"

"Done?" dropping his eye-glass.

"Yes. Knowing that Abbott would have no earthly chance against the Italian, I went to him and forced him to write an apology. And you have blown the whole thing higher than a kite."

The colonel's eyes bulged. "Dem it, why didn't the young fool tell me?"

"Your hurry probably rattled him. But what are we going to do? I'm not going to have the boy hurt. I love him as a brother; though, just now, he regards me as a mortal enemy. Perhaps I am," moodily. "I have deceived him, and somehow — blindly it is true — he knows it. I am as full of deceit as a pomegranate is of seeds."

"Have him send another apology."

"The Barone is thoroughly enraged. He would refuse to accept it, and said so."

"Well, dem me for a well-meaning meddler!"

"With pleasure, but that will not stop the row. There is a way out, but it appeals to me as damnably low."

"Oh, Abbott will not run. He isn't that kind."

"No, he'll not run. But if you will agree with me, honor may be satisfied without either of them getting hurt."

"Women beat the devil, don't they? What's your plan?"

Courtlandt outlined it.

The colonel frowned. "That doesn't sound like you. Beastly trick."

"I know it."

"We'll lunch first. It will take a few pegs to get that idea through this bally head of mine."

When Abbott came over later that day, he was subdued in manner. He laughed occasionally, smoked a few cigars, but declined

stimulants. He even played a game of tennis creditably. And after dinner he shot a hundred billiards. The colonel watched his hands keenly. There was not the slightest indication of nerves.

"Hang the boy!" he muttered. "I ought to be ashamed of myself. There isn't a bit of funk in his whole make-up."

At nine Abbott retired. He did not sleep very well. He was irked by the morbid idea that the Barone was going to send the bullet through his throat. He was up at five. He strolled about the garden. He realized that it was very good to be alive. Once he gazed somberly at the little white villa, away to the north. How crisply it stood out against the dark foliage! How blue the water was! And far, far away the serene snowcaps! Nora Harrigan . . . Well, he was going to stand up like a man. She should never be ashamed of her memory of him. If he went out, all worry would be at an end,

and that would be something. What a mess he had made of things! He did not blame the Italian. A duel! he, the son of a man who had invented wash-tubs, was going to fight a duel! He wanted to laugh; he wanted to cry. Wasn't he just dreaming? Wasn't it all a nightmare out of which he would presently awake?

"Breakfast, Sahib," said Rao, deferentially touching his arm.

He was awake; it was all true.

"You'll want coffee," began the colonel. "Drink as much as you like. And you'll find the eggs good, too." The colonel wanted to see if Abbott ate well.

The artist helped himself twice and drank three cups of coffee. "You know, I suppose all men in a hole like this have funny ideas. I was just thinking that I should like a partridge and a bottle of champagne."

"We'll have that for tiffin," said the col-

onel, confidentially. In fact, he summoned the butler and gave the order.

"It's mighty kind of you, Colonel, to buck me up this way."

"Rot!" The colonel experienced a slight heat in his leathery cheeks. "All you've got to do is to hold your arm out straight, pull the trigger, and squint afterward."

"I sha'n't hurt the Barone," smiling faintly.

"Are you going to be ass enough to pop your gun in the air?" indignantly.

Abbott shrugged; and the colonel cursed himself for the guiltiest scoundrel unhung.

Half an hour later the opponents stood at each end of the tennis-court. Ellicott, the surgeon, had laid open his medical case. He was the most agitated of the five men. His fingers shook as he spread out the lints and bandages. The colonel and Courtlandt had solemnly gone through the formality of load-

ing the weapons. The sun had not climbed over the eastern summits, but the snow on the western tops was rosy.

"At the word three, gentlemen, you will fire," said the colonel.

The two shots came simultaneously. Abbott had deliberately pointed his into the air. For a moment he stood perfectly still; then, his knees sagged, and he toppled forward on his face.

"Great God!" whispered the colonel; "you must have forgotten the ramrod!"

He, Courtlandt, and the surgeon rushed over to the fallen man. The Barone stood like stone. Suddenly, with a gesture of horror, he flung aside his smoking pistol and ran across the court.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "on my honor, I aimed three feet above his head." He wrung his hands together in anxiety. "It is impossible! It is only that I wished to see if he



Suddenly he flung aside his smoking pistol.



were a brave man. I shoot well. It is impossible!" he reiterated.

Rapidly the cunning hand of the surgeon ran over Abbott's body. He finally shook his head. "Nothing has touched him. His heart gave under. Fainted."

When Abbott came to his senses, he smiled weakly. The Barone was one of the two who helped him to his feet.

"I feel like a fool," he said.

"Ah, let me apologize now," said the Barone. "What I did at the ball was wrong, and I should not have lost my temper. I had come to you to apologize then. But I am Italian. It is natural that I should lose my temper," naïvely.

"We're both of us a pair of fools, Barone. There was always some one else. A couple of fools."

"Yes," admitted the Barone eagerly.

"Considering," whispered the colonel in

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Courtlandt's ear; "considering that neither of them knew they were shooting nothing more dangerous than wads, they're pretty good specimens. Eh, what?"

CHAPTER XIX

COURTLANDT TELLS A STORY

THE Colonel and his guests at luncheon had listened to Courtlandt without sound or movement beyond the occasional rasp of feet shifting under the table. He had begun with the old familiar phrase—"I've got a story."

"Tell it," had been the instant request.

At the beginning the men had been leaning at various negligent angles,—some with their elbows upon the table, some with their arms thrown across the backs of their chairs. The partridge had been excellent, the wine delicious, the tobacco irreproachable. Burma, the tinkle of bells in the temples, the strange pictures in the bazaars, long journeys over smooth and stormy seas; romance, moving

and colorful, which began at Rangoon, had zig-zagged around the world, and ended in Berlin.

"And so," concluded the teller of the tale, "that is the story. This man was perfectly innocent of any wrong, a victim of malice on the one hand and of injustice on the other."

"Is that the end of the yarn?" asked the colonel.

"Who in life knows what the end of anything is? This is not a story out of a book." Courtlandt accepted a fresh cigar from the box which Rao passed to him, and dropped his dead weed into the ash-bowl.

"Has he given up?" asked Abbott, his voice strangely unfamiliar in his own ears.

"A man can struggle just so long against odds, then he wins or becomes broken. Women are not logical; generally they permit themselves to be guided by impulse rather than by reason. This man I am telling you about was proud; perhaps too proud. It is a shameful fact, but he ran away. True, he wrote

letter after letter, but all these were returned unopened. Then he stopped."

"A woman would a good deal rather believe circumstantial evidence than not. Humph!" The colonel primed his pipe and relighted it. "She couldn't have been worth much."

"Worth much!" cried Abbott. "What do you imply by that?"

"No man will really give up a woman who is really worth while, that is, of course, admitting that your man, Courtlandt, *is* a man. Perhaps, though, it was his fault. He was not persistent enough, maybe a bit spineless. The fact that he gave up so quickly possibly convinced her that her impressions were correct. Why, I'd have followed her day in and day out, year after year; never would I have let up until I had proved to her that she had been wrong."

"The colonel is right," Abbott approved, never taking his eyes off Courtlandt, who was

apparently absorbed in the contemplation of the bread crumbs under his fingers.

"And more, by hook or crook, I'd have dragged in the other woman by the hair and made her confess."

"I do not doubt it, Colonel," responded Courtlandt, with a dry laugh. "And that would really have been the end of the story. The heroine of this rambling tale would then have been absolutely certain of collusion between the two."

"That is like a woman," the Barone agreed, and he knew something about them. "And where is this man now?"

"Here," said Courtlandt, pushing back his chair and rising. "I am he." He turned his back upon them and sought the garden.

Tableau!

"Dash me!" cried the colonel, who, being the least interested personally, was first to recover his speech.

The Barone drew in his breath sharply. Then he looked at Abbott.

"I suspected it," replied Abbott to the mute question. Since the episode of that morning his philosophical outlook had broadened. He had fought a duel and had come out of it with flying colors. As long as he lived he was certain that the petty affairs of the day were never again going to disturb him.

"Let him be," was the colonel's suggestion, adding a gesture in the direction of the case-ment door through which Courtlandt had gone. "He's as big a man as Nora is a woman. If he has returned with the determination of winning her, he will."

They did not see Courtlandt again. After a few minutes of restless to-and-froing, he proceeded down to the landing, helped himself to the colonel's motor-boat, and returned to Belaggio. At the hotel he asked for the duke, only to be told that the duke and madame had

left that morning for Paris. Courtlandt saw that he had permitted one great opportunity to slip past. He gave up the battle. One more good look at her, and he would go away. The odds had been too strong for him, and he knew that he was broken.

When the motor-boat came back, Abbott and the Barone made use of it also. They crossed in silence, heavy-hearted.

On landing Abbott said: "It is probable that I shall not see you again this year. I am leaving to-morrow for Paris. It's a great world, isn't it, where they toss us around like dice? Some throw sixes and others deuces. And in this game you and I have lost two out of three."

"I shall return to Rome," replied the Barone. "My long leave of absence is near its end."

"What in the world can have happened?" demanded Nora, showing the two notes to Celeste. "Here's Donald going to Paris to-

morrow and the Barone to Rome. They will bid us good-by at tea. I don't understand. Donald was to remain until we left for America, and the Barone's leave does not end until October."

"To-morrow?" Dim-eyed, Celeste returned the notes.

"Yes. You play the fourth *ballade* and I'll sing from *Madame*. It will be very lonesome without them." Nora gazed into the wall mirror and gave a pat or two to her hair.

When the men arrived, it was impressed on Nora's mind that never had she seen them so amiable toward each other. They were positively friendly. And why not? The test of the morning had proved each of them to his own individual satisfaction, and had done away with those stilted mannerisms that generally make rivals ridiculous in all eyes save their own. The revelation at luncheon had convinced them of the futility of things in general and of woman in particular. They

were, without being aware of the fact, each a consolation to the other. The old adage that misery loves company was never more nicely typified.

If Celeste expected Nora to exhibit any signs of distress over the approaching departure, she was disappointed. In truth, Nora was secretly pleased to be rid of these two suitors, much as she liked them. The Barone had not yet proposed, and his sudden determination to return to Rome eliminated this disagreeable possibility. She was glad Abbott was going because she had hurt him without intention, and the sight of him was, in spite of her innocence, a constant reproach. Presently she would have her work, and there would be no time for loneliness.

The person who suffered keenest was Celeste. She was awake; the tender little dream was gone; and bravely she accepted the fact. Never her agile fingers stumbled, and she played remarkably well, from Beethoven,

Chopin, Grieg, Rubinstein, MacDowell. And Nora, perversely enough, sang from old light opera.

When the two men departed, Celeste went to her room and Nora out upon the terrace. It was after five. No one was about, so far as she could see. She stood enchanted over the transformation that was affecting the mountains and the lakes. How she loved the spot! How she would have liked to spend the rest of her days here! And how beautiful all the world was to-day!

She gave a frightened little scream. A strong pair of arms had encircled her. She started to cry out again, but the sound was muffled and blotted out by the pressure of a man's lips upon her own. She struggled violently, and suddenly was freed.

"If I were a man," she said, "you should die for that!"

"It was an opportunity not to be ignored," returned Courtlandt. "It is true that I was

a fool to run away as I did, but my return has convinced me that I should have been as much a fool had I remained to tag you about, begging for an interview. I wrote you letters. You returned them unopened. You have condemned me without a hearing. So be it. You may consider that kiss the farewell appearance so dear to the operative heart," bitterly.

He addressed most of this to the back of her head, for she was already walking toward the villa into which she disappeared with the proud air of some queen of tragedy. She was a capital actress.

A heavy hand fell upon Courtlandt's shoulder. He was irresistibly drawn right about face.

"Now, then, Mr. Courtlandt," said Harri-gan, his eyes blue and cold as ice, "perhaps you will explain?"

With rage and despair in his heart, Courtlandt flung off the hand and answered: "I refuse!"

"Ah!" Harrigan stood off a few steps and ran his glance critically up and down this man of whom he had thought to make a friend. "You're a husky lad. There's one way out of this for you."

"So long as it does not necessitate any explanations," indifferently.

"In the bottom of one of Nora's trunks is a set of my old gloves. There will not be any one up at the tennis-court this time of day. If you are not a mean cuss, if you are not an ordinary low-down imitation of a man, you'll meet me up there inside of five minutes. If you can stand up in front of me for ten minutes, you need not make any explanations. On the other hand, you'll hike out of here as fast as boats and trains can take you. And never come back."

"I am nearly twenty years younger than you, Mr. Harrigan."

"Oh, don't let that worry you any," with a truculent laugh.

“Very well. You will find me there. After all, you are her father.”

“You bet I am!”

Harrigan stole into his daughter's room and soundlessly bored into the bottom of the trunk that contained the relics of past glory. As he pulled them forth, a folded oblong strip of parchment came out with them and fluttered to the floor; but he was too busily engaged to notice it, nor would he have bothered if he had. The bottom of the trunk was littered with old letters and programs and operatic scores. He wrapped the gloves in a newspaper and got away without being seen. He was as happy as a boy who had discovered an opening in the fence between him and the apple orchard. He was rather astonished to see Courtlandt kneeling in the clover-patch, hunting for a four-leaf clover. It was patent that the young man was not troubled with nerves.

“Here!” he cried, brusquely, tossing over a pair of gloves. “If this method of settling

the dispute isn't satisfactory, I'll accept your explanations."

For reply Courtlandt stood up and stripped to his undershirt. He drew on the gloves and laced them with the aid of his teeth. Then he kneaded them carefully. The two men eyed each other a little more respectfully than they had ever done before.

"This single court is about as near as we can make it. The man who steps outside is whipped."

"I agree," said Courtlandt.

"No rounds with rests; until one or the other is outside. Clean breaks. That's about all. Now, put up your dukes and take a man's licking. I thought you were your father's son, but I guess you are like the rest of 'em, hunters of women."

Courtlandt laughed and stepped to the middle of the court. Harrigan did not waste any time. He sent in a straight jab to the jaw, but Courtlandt blocked it neatly and countered

with a hard one on Harrigan's ear, which began to swell.

"Fine!" growled Harrigan. "You know something about the game. It won't be as if I was walloping a baby." He sent a left to the body, but the right failed to reach his man.

For some time Harrigan jabbed and swung and upper-cut; often he reached his opponent's body, but never his face. It worried him a little to find that he could not stir Courtlandt more than two or three feet. Courtlandt never followed up any advantage, thus making Harrigan force the fighting, which was rather to his liking. But presently it began to enter his mind convincingly that apart from the initial blow, the younger man was working wholly on the defensive. As if he were afraid he might hurt him! This served to make the old fellow furious. He bored in right and left, left and right, and Courtlandt gave way, step by step until he was so close to the line

that he could see it from the corner of his eye. This glance, swift as it was, came near to being his undoing. Harrigan caught him with a terrible right on the jaw. It was a glancing blow, otherwise the fight would have ended then and there. Instantly he lurched forward and clenched before the other could add the finishing touch.

The two pushed about, Harrigan fiercely striving to break the younger man's hold. He was beginning to breathe hard besides. A little longer, and his blows would lack the proper steam. Finally Courtlandt broke away of his own accord. His head buzzed a little, but, aside from that he had recovered. Harrigan pursued his tactics and rushed. But this time there was an offensive return. Courtlandt became the aggressor. There was no withstanding him. And Harrigan fairly saw the end; but with that indomitable pluck which had made him famous in the annals of the ring, he kept banging away. The swift cruel jabs

here and there upon his body began to tell. Oh, for a minute's rest and a piece of lemon on his parched tongue! Suddenly Courtlandt rushed him tigerishly, landing a jab which closed Harrigan's right eye. Courtlandt dropped his hands, and stepped back. His glance traveled suggestively to Harrigan's feet. He was outside the "ropes".

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Harrigan, for losing my temper."

"What's the odds? I lost mine. You win." Harrigan was a true sportsman. He had no excuses to offer. He had dug the pit of humiliation with his own hands. He recognized this as one of two facts. The other was, that had Courtlandt extended himself, the battle would have lasted about one minute. It was gall and wormwood, but there you were.

"And now, you ask for explanations. Ask your daughter to make them." Courtlandt pulled off the gloves and got into his clothes. "You may add, sir, that I shall never

trouble her again with my unwelcome attentions. I leave for Milan in the morning." Courtlandt left the field of victory without further comment.

"Well, what do you think of that?" mused Harrigan, as he stooped over to gather up the gloves. "Any one would say that he was the injured party. I'm in wrong on this deal somewhere. I'll ask Miss Nora a question or two."

It was not so easy returning. He ran into his wife. He tried to dodge her, but without success.

"James, where did you get that black eye?" tragically.

"It's a daisy, ain't it, Molly?" pushing past her into Nora's room and closing the door after him.

"Father!"

"That you, Nora?" blinking.

"Father, if you have been fighting with *him*, I'll never forgive you."

"Forget it, Nora. I wasn't fighting. I only thought I was."

He raised the lid of the trunk and cast in the gloves haphazard. And then he saw the paper which had fallen out. He picked it up and squinted at it, for he could not see very well. Nora was leaving the room in a temper.

"Going, Nora?"

"I am. And I advise you to have your dinner in your room."

Alone, he turned on the light. It never occurred to him that he might be prying into some of Nora's private correspondence. He unfolded the parchment and held it under the light. For a long time he stared at the writing, which was in English, at the date, at the names. Then he quietly refolded it and put it away for future use, immediate future use.

"This is a great world," he murmured, rubbing his ear tenderly.

CHAPTER XX

JOURNEY'S END

HARRIGAN dined alone. He was in disgrace; he was sore, mentally as well as physically; and he ate his dinner without relish, in simple obedience to those well regulated periods of hunger that assailed him three times a day, in spring, summer, autumn and winter. By the time the waiter had cleared away the dishes, Harrigan had a perfecto between his teeth (along with a certain matrimonial bit), and smoked as if he had wagered to finish the cigar in half the usual stretch. He then began to walk the floor, much after the fashion of a man who has the toothache, or the earache, which would be more to the point. To his direct mind no diplomacy was needed; all that was necessary was a few blunt

questions. Nora could answer them as she chose. Nora, his baby, his little girl that used to run around barefooted and laugh when he applied the needed birch! How children grew up! And they never grew too old for the birch; they certainly never did.

They heard him from the drawing-room; tramp, tramp, tramp.

"Let him be, Nora," said Mrs. Harrigan, wisely. "He is in a rage about something. And your father is not the easiest man to approach when he's mad. If he fought Mr. Courtlandt, he believed he had some good reason for doing so."

"Mother, there are times when I believe you are afraid of father."

"I am always afraid of him. It is only because I make believe I'm not that I can get him to do anything. It was dreadful. And Mr. Courtlandt was such a gentleman. I could cry. But let your father be until to-morrow."

"And have him wandering about with that

black eye? Something must be done for it. I'm not afraid of him."

"Sometimes I wish you were."

So Nora entered the lion's den fearlessly. "Is there anything I can do for you, dad?"

"You can get the witch-hazel and bathe this lamp of mine," grimly.

She ran into her own room and returned with the simpler devices for reducing a swollen eye. She did not notice, or pretended that she didn't, that he locked the door and put the key in his pocket. He sat down in a chair, under the light; and she went to work deftly.

"I've got some make-up, and to-morrow morning I'll paint it for you."

"You don't ask any questions," he said, with grimness.

"Would it relieve your eye any?" lightly.

He laughed. "No; but it might relieve my mind."

"Well, then, why did you do so foolish a thing? At your age! Don't you know that

you can't go on whipping every man you take a dislike to?"

"I haven't taken any dislike to Courtlandt. But I saw him kiss you."

"I can take care of myself."

"Perhaps. I asked him to explain. He refused. One thing puzzled me, though I didn't know what it was at the time. Now, when a fellow steals a kiss from a beautiful woman like you, Nora, I don't see why he should feel mad about it. When he had all but knocked your daddy to by-by, he said that you could explain. . . . Don't press so hard," warningly. "Well, can you?"

"Since you saw what he did, I do not see where explanations on my part are necessary."

"Nora, I've never caught you in a lie. I never want to. When you were little you were the truthfulest thing I ever saw. No matter what kind of a licking was in store for you, you weren't afraid; you told the truth. . . . There, that'll do. Put some cotton over it and

bind it with a handkerchief. It'll be black all right, but the swelling will go down. I can tell 'em a tennis-ball hit me. It was more like a cannon-ball, though. Say, Nora, you know I've always pooh-poohed these amateurs. People used to say that there were dozens of men in New York in my prime who could have laid me cold. I used to laugh. Well, I guess they were right. Courtlandt's got the stiffest kick I ever ran into. A pile-driver, and if he had landed on my jaw, it would have been *dormi bene*, as you say when you bid me good night in dago. That's all right now until tomorrow. I want to talk to you. Draw up a chair. There! As I said, I've never caught you in a lie, but I find that you've been living a lie for two years. You haven't been square to me, nor to your mother, nor to the chaps that came around and made love to you. You probably didn't look at it that way, but there's the fact. I'm not Paul Pry; but accidentally I came across this," taking the document from

his pocket and handing it to her. "Read it. What's the answer?"

Nora's hands trembled.

"Takes you a long time to read it. Is it true?"

"Yes."

"And I went up to the tennis-court with the intention of knocking his head off; and now I'm wondering why he didn't knock off mine. Nora, he's a man; and when you get through with this, I'm going down to the hotel and apologize."

"You will do nothing of the sort; not with that eye."

"All right. I was always worried for fear you'd hook up with some duke you'd have to support. Now, I want to know how this chap happens to be my son-in-law. Make it brief, for I don't want to get tangled up more than is necessary."

Nora crackled the certificate in her fingers and stared unseeingly at it for some time. "I

met him first in Rangoon," she began slowly, without raising her eyes.

"When you went around the world on your own?"

"Yes. Oh, don't worry. I was always able to take care of myself."

"An Irish idea," answered Harrigan complacently.

"I loved him, father, with all my heart and soul. He was not only big and strong and handsome, but he was kindly and tender and thoughtful. Why, I never knew that he was rich until after I had promised to be his wife. When I learned that he was the Edward Courtlandt who was always getting into the newspapers, I laughed. There were stories about his escapades. There were innuendoes regarding certain women, but I put them out of my mind as twaddle. Ah, never had I been so happy! In Berlin we went about like two children. It was play. He brought me to the Opera and took me away; and we had the most

charming little suppers. I never wrote you or mother because I wished to surprise you."

"You have. Go on."

"I had never paid much attention to Flora Desimone, though I knew that she was jealous of my success. Several times I caught her looking at Edward in a way I did not like."

"She looked at him, huh?"

"It was the last performance of the season. We were married that afternoon. We did not want any one to know about it. I was not to leave the stage until the end of the following season. We were staying at the same hotel, with rooms across the corridor. This was much against his wishes, but I prevailed."

"I see."

"Our rooms were opposite, as I said. After the performance that night I went to mine to complete the final packing. We were to leave at one for the Tyrol. Father, I saw Flora Desimone come out of his room."

Harrigan shut and opened his hands.

"Do you understand? I saw her. She was laughing. I did not see him. My wedding night! She came from his room. My heart stopped, the world stopped, everything went black. All the stories that I had read and heard came back. When he knocked at my door I refused to see him. I never saw him again until that night in Paris when he forced his way into my apartment."

"Hang it, Nora, this doesn't sound like him!"

"I saw her."

"He wrote you?"

"I returned the letters, unopened."

"That wasn't square. You might have been wrong."

"He wrote five letters. After that he went to India, to Africa and back to India, where he seemed to find consolation enough."

Harrigan laid it to his lack of normal vision, but to his single optic there was anything but misery in her beautiful blue eyes. True, they

sparkled with tears; but that signified nothing: he hadn't been married these thirty-odd years without learning that a woman weeps for any of a thousand and one reasons.

"Do you care for him still?"

"Not a day passed during these many months that I did not vow I hated him."

"Any one else know?"

"The padre. I had to tell some one or go mad. But I didn't hate him. I could no more put him out of my life than I could stop breathing. Ah, I have been so miserable and unhappy!" She laid her head upon his knees and clumsily he stroked it. His girl!

"That's the trouble with us Irish, Nora. We jump without looking, without finding whether we're right or wrong. Well, your daddy's opinion is that you should have read his first letter. If it didn't ring right, why, you could have jumped the traces. I don't believe he did anything wrong at all. It isn't in the man's blood to do anything underboard."

"But I *saw* her," a queer look in her eyes as she glanced up at him.

"I don't care a kioodle if you did. Take it from me, it was a put-up job by that Calabrian woman. She might have gone to his room for any number of harmless things. But I think she was curious."

"Why didn't she come to me, if she wanted to ask questions?"

"I can see you answering 'em. She probably just wanted to know if you were married or not. She might have been in love with him, and then she might not. These Italians don't know half the time what they're about, anyhow. But I don't believe it of Courtlandt. He doesn't line up that way. Besides, he's got eyes. You're a thousand times more attractive. He's no fool. Know what I think? As she was coming out she saw *you* at your door; and the devil in her got busy."

Nora rose, flung her arms around him and kissed him.

"Look out for that tin ear!"

"Oh, you great big, loyal, true-hearted man! Open that door and let me get out to the terrace. I want to sing, sing!"

"He said he was going to Milan in the morning."

She danced to the door and was gone.

"Nora!" he called, impatiently. He listened in vain for the sound of her return. "Well, I'll take the count when it comes to guessing what a woman's going to do. I'll go out and square up with the old girl. Wonder how this news will harness up with her social bug?"

Courtlandt got into his compartment at Varenna. He had tipped the guard liberally not to open the door for any one else, unless the train was crowded. As the shrill blast of the conductor's horn sounded the warning of "all aboard," the door opened and a heavily veiled woman got in hurriedly. The train began to move instantly. The guard slammed

the door and latched it. Courtlandt sighed: the futility of trusting these Italians, of trying to buy their loyalty! The woman was without any luggage whatever, not even the usual magazine. She was dressed in brown, her hat was brown, her veil, her gloves, her shoes. But whether she was young or old was beyond his deduction. He opened his *Corriere* and held it before his eyes; but he found reading impossible. The newspaper finally slipped from his hands to the floor where it swayed and rustled unnoticed. He was staring at the promontory across Lecco, the green and restful hill, the little earthly paradise out of which he had been unjustly cast. He couldn't understand. He had lived cleanly and decently; he had wronged no man or woman, nor himself. And yet, through some evil twist of fate, he had lost all there was in life worth having. The train lurched around a shoulder of the mountain. He leaned against the window. In a moment more the villa was gone.

What was it? He felt irresistibly drawn. Without intending to do so, he turned and stared at the woman in brown. Her hand went to the veil and swept it aside. Nora was as full of romance as a child. She could have stopped him before he made the boat, but she wanted to be alone with him.

“Nora!”

She flung herself on her knees in front of him. “I am a wretch!” she said.

He could only repeat her name.

“I am not worth my salt. Ah, why did you run away? Why did you not pursue me, importune me until I wearied? . . . perhaps gladly? There were times when I would have opened my arms had you been the worst scoundrel in the world instead of the dearest lover, the patientest! Ah, can you forgive me?”

“Forgive you, Nora?” He was numb.

“I am a miserable wretch! I doubted you, I! When all I had to do was to recall the way

people misrepresented things I had done! I sent back your letters . . . and read and reread the old blue ones. Don't you remember how you used to write them on blue paper? . . . Flora told me everything. It was only because she hated me, not that she cared anything about you. She told me that night at the ball. I believe the duke forced her to do it. She was at the bottom of the abduction. When you kissed me . . . didn't you know that I kissed you back? Edward, I am a miserable wretch, but I shall follow you wherever you go, and I haven't even a vanity-box in my hand-bag!" There were tears in her eyes. "Say that I am a wretch!"

He drew her up beside him. His arms closed around her so hungrily, so strongly, that she gasped a little. He looked into her eyes; his glance traveled here and there over her face, searching for the familiar dimple at one corner of her mouth.

"Nora!" he whispered.

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"Kiss me!"

And then the train came to a stand, jerkily. They fell back against the cushions.

"Lecco!" cried the guard through the window.

They laughed like children.

"I bribed him," she said gaily. "And now . . ."

"Yes, and now?" eagerly, if still bewilderedly.

"Let's go back!"

THE END



